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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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India & Bangladesh at loggerheads over border tensions

B'desh summons Indian envoy, flags concerns

DHAKA, 12 JAN

Bangladesh's Foreign Secretary MD Jashim Uddin has expressed significant concern over escalating tensions along the Bangladesh-India border during a meeting with Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma on Sunday. The meeting, which lasted approximately 45 minutes, was held at the Foreign Ministry following reports that Verma was summoned to discuss the situation.

According to a statement from the foreign ministry, Uddin highlighted the troubling activities of India's Border Security Force (BSF), particularly regarding unauthorized attempts to construct barbed wire fencing along the border. He noted that such actions exacerbate tensions and undermine the spirit of cooperation between the neighbouring countries. Uddin voiced hope that the upcoming Director General-level talks between the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and BSF would provide an opportunity to address these issues in depth. Verma, speaking to the media after the meeting, reaffirmed India's commitment to maintaining a crime-free border. He stressed the importance of cooperation between the BSF and BGB in addressing challenges such as smuggling and trafficking. However, the backdrop to the discussion includes Bangladesh's allegations of India's efforts to construct fences at five locations along the border, which Dhaka claims violate bilateral agreements.

India has completed fencing 3,271km of the 4,156km border, leaving approximately 885km unfenced **PHOTO: X**

The foreign secretary also expressed deep concern over the recent killing of a Bangladeshi citizen by the BSF. He urged Indian authorities to take immediate action to prevent such occurrences and thoroughly investigate these incidents. Uddin reiterated that despite previous commitments from Indian officials to adopt a non-lethal approach, incidents of border killings persist. In addressing the wider context, Home Affairs Adviser Lt Gen (retd.) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury noted that India has paused the construction of barbed wire fencing due to local opposition. He acknowledged the historical context of the border agreements, citing earlier MOUs that require mutual consent for any developments along the boundary. He also mentioned that India has completed fencing 3,271km of the 4,156km border, leaving approximately 885km unfenced. *—PTI*

Chamarajpet tense as miscreants attack 3 cows, probe on

BENGALURU, 12 JAN

Tension gripped Chamarajpet area in the City after unidentified people attacked three cows, severing their udders.

According to police sources, the incident occurred at Vinayakanagar in Chamarajpet. The cows belong to a local named Karna.

Residents woke up to the distressing sounds of the cattle and found the injured animals lying in a pool of blood, sparking outrage in the locality.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said he has directed Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda to investigate the case and take action.

Reacting to the incident, BJP announced plans to observe 'Black Sankranti' if the government failed to take action.

- CM Siddaramaiah said he has directed Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda to investigate the case.

"This heinous act reflects a Jihadi mindset.," Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Assembly R Ashoka told reporters. He announced a compensation of Rs 1 lakh for the owner of cows.

He further stressed the cultural and religious significance of cows and bulls, which are decorated and worshipped during Sankranti festival.

"After this incident, how could we celebrate Sankranti?" Ashoka asked.

He along with the party workers visited the spot and consoled the owner of the cows.

Several BJP leaders, including the Leader of Opposition in the state Legislative Council Chalavadi Narayanaswamy and former Deputy Chief Minister CN Ashwath Narayan condemned the incident.

Siddaramaiah said he would ensure that whoever did it will be brought to book. To a query on Hindu outfits staging protests, Siddaramaiah said they were trying to "politicise" the issue. *—PTI*

EAM to represent India at Trump's inauguration

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is set to represent India at the inauguration of Donald Trump, who will be sworn in as the 47th President of the United States on 20 January. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced that Jaishankar will engage in discussions with representatives of the incoming Trump administration during his visit to the US.

Trump, who recently defeated Vice President Kamala Harris in the November presidential election, previously held the position of the 45th President from January 2017 to January 2021. Last month, Jaishankar remarked that Trump holds a positive outlook towards India and posited that India is in a strong position to advance "deeper" ties with the new administration. Trump will be inaugurated as the President at noon (Eastern Time). He will take the oath with Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

MAKAR SANKRANTI IS HERE

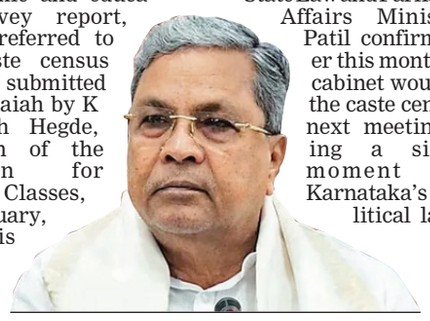
A vendor sells sugarcane in Bengaluru on Sunday, ahead of the Makar Sankranti **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Siddaramaiah hints at tabling caste census in next Cabinet meet

VIJAYANAGARA, 12 JAN

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah indicated on Sunday that the long-awaited caste census report is set to be presented in the upcoming cabinet meeting. "We received the report last year. It must be tabled before the cabinet. We have invested Rs 160 crore in it. Let's see what discussions and decisions arise in the cabinet," Siddaramaiah informed reporters.

The Chief Minister addressed concerns regarding opposition to the caste census, stating, "There will be either support or opposition to the caste census and reservations." The socio-economic and educational survey report, commonly referred to as the caste census report, was submitted to Siddaramaiah by K Jayaprakash Hegde, Chairperson of the Commission for Backward Classes, on 29 February, 2024. This submission has sparked debate among various backward communities, with some expressing their discontent.



State Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil confirmed earlier this month that the cabinet would review the caste census in its next meeting, marking a significant moment in Karnataka's socio-political landscape. *—PTI*

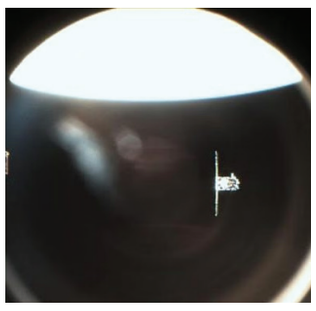
>>> More on Page 2

ISRO brings SpaDeX satellites within 3m

BENGALURU, 12 JAN

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) announced on Sunday that its recent endeavour involving two satellites for space docking experiments successfully brought them within three metres of each other, followed by a safe retreat to a greater distance in a test run. The agency stated that further analysis of the gathered data is necessary before proceeding with the actual docking process.

The Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) project has faced delays, missing two previously scheduled docking attempts on 7 and 9 January. The mission was launched on 30 December. The PSLV C60 rocket lifted off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, carrying two small satellites—SDX01 (Chaser) and SDX02 (Target)—alongside 24 additional payloads. Approximately 15 minutes post-launch, the two satellites, each weighing around 220 kilograms, were successfully positioned in a 475-kilometre circular orbit. ISRO describes the SpaDeX project as a cost-effective technology demonstrator for in-space docking with small spacecraft.



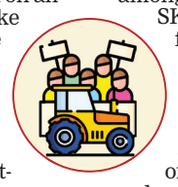
SpaDeX satellites hold positions at 15m, capturing photos of each other **PHOTO: @ISRO/ X**

A successful outcome would position India as the fourth nation to master this complex technolog. *—PTI*

Farmers to take out tractor rally on Republic Day

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) has announced plans for tractor marches across India on 26 January 2025, calling on Prime Minister Narendra Modi to engage in discussions regarding farmers' longstanding demands. This decision follows growing concerns for the health of farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who has been on an indefinite hunger strike for 48 days at the Khanauri border between Punjab and Haryana.



Dallewal, who is the convener of SKM (Non-Political), is fasting to demand a legal guarantee for the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops, among other issues. The SKM's statement urged farmers to participate in parades at district and sub-division levels, highlighting demands for immediate talks with Kisan organisations, the withdrawal of the National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing, and legislation for MSP. Additional demands include a comprehensive loan waiver for farmers, opposition to electricity privatisation, and free electricity provisions. The SKM condemned what it described as the Prime Minister's authoritarian approach and alleged failure to intervene despite Dallewal's condition. *—PTI*

AAP files case against BJP for misinformation

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

AAP has filed a complaint with the Election Commission of India, accusing the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of spreading false information and breaching the Model Code of Conduct. AAP claims that the BJP circulated a misleading video on social media, depicting poor road conditions purportedly in Delhi, which were actually from Faridabad, Haryana.

In its complaint, AAP included screenshots of tweets from the BJP's Delhi account and links to videos debunking the false claims. The AAP argues that such actions represent a serious violation of electoral integrity and has urged the Election Commission to take strict measures, including legal action against the BJP. The party seeks the immediate removal of the video and requests rigorous actions to prevent similar misinformation in future elections. The BJP has yet to respond to these allegations. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

5 Naxalites killed in Chhattisgarh

BIJAPUR, 12 JAN

Five Naxalites, including two women, were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Sunday, police said. The gunfight broke out in the morning at a forest in the Indravati National Park area when a joint team of security was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, Inspector General of Police, Bastar Range, Sundarraj P said. *— PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

Say no to Olaf: Musk backs Far-Right in Germany polls

TEXAS, 12 JAN

Tesla CEO Elon Musk has called on Germans to "say no" to Chancellor Olaf Scholz after the ruling Social Democrats (SPD) nominated him as their candidate for the federal elections on 23 February, 2025. Musk's comments on X were in response to two news reports—one about Scholz's nomination and another about a controversial legal case involving a convicted woman. Musk posted, "Sag Nein zu Scholz!" (Say No to Scholz).

Musk has also publicly supported the Far-Right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party ahead of the snap elections. He described AfD co-leader Alice Weidel as "very reasonable" and urged Germans to vote for the party, claiming, "Only AfD can save Germany."

Elon Musk **PHOTO: ANI**

Musk compared the political situation in Germany to the US, urging voters to support change, similar to Trump's rise. Weidel, during a conversation with Musk, called AfD "the only protector of the Jewish people" in Germany, emphasising the party's stance on protecting Jewish life.

Musk's endorsements have sparked backlash in Germany. Government officials, including SPD co-leader Lars Klingbeil, accused Musk of election interference, comparing him to Russian President Vladimir Putin. *—ANI*

FOR WORKING PEOPLE

B'luru is India's most women-friendly City

BENGALURU, 12 JAN

Bengaluru has surpassed Chennai to secure the top position as the best city in the country for working women in 2024, according to a recent study.

According to the Top Cities for Women in India 2024 report by Avtar group, South India emerged as the most gender-inclusive region with 16 cities in the south featuring in the top 25.

Chennai has been recognised as the second best in the top three cities in India excelling in social and industrial inclusion for women, it said.

As many as eight cities from Tamil Nadu have figured in the list with the capital city ranking second for being the most inclusive, safe and resilient and sustainable city for working women.

Chennai has been recognised as the 2nd best in the top three cities in India excelling in social and industrial inclusion for women **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

Avtar Group Founder-President Saundarya Rajesh said Chennai came second for being the most inclusive, safe, resilient, sustainable city for working women and Tamil Nadu dominated the survey results with Coimbatore, Tiruchirappalli, Vellore, Madurai, Salem, Erode and Tiruppur also being on the top of the list.

"Cities are the foundations of opportunity. They shape how women live work and thrive. A clear understanding of the core principles and cultural fabric of our cities is crucial for advancing women's progress and inclusion," Rajesh said on the findings.

"To realise the dream of Viksit Bharat by 2047, we need women professionals to succeed on par with men. This is possible only if cities are truly gender inclusive and offer an atmosphere where women's strengths can be optimised," she added.

The Top Cities for Women in India index identifies role model cities and best practices, and provides a framework for organisations, policy makers to foster well-rounded development in cities, which play a pivotal role in progress of women, nationwide. *—PTI*

CM will complete 5-year term: Mahadevappa

MYSURU, 12 JAN

Social Welfare and District Minister HC Mahadevappa on Sunday reiterated that Siddaramaiah will rule the State as Chief Minister during the government's entire five-year term. "As CM post is not vacant now, the question of change of guard will not at all arise now. Speculations of a change of guard in the state is all media creation," Mahadevappa said. About KPCC President DK Shivakumar's remark on the party High Command, Mahadevappa said, "High Command is always with all Congress leaders, including him and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah." On PWD minister Satish Jharkhiholi's chief minister ambitions for 2028, Mahadevappa said the High Command will decide on this, too. *—Salar News*

6 injured after 2 cars collide in City's Indiranagar

BENGALURU, 12 JAN

Six individuals sustained injuries in a head-on collision involving two cars early on Sunday near the KFC Junction in Indiranagar, within the jurisdiction of the Jeevan Bima Nagar traffic police station. A senior traffic officer reported that the accident occurred when the driver of an Audi SUV, travelling from 6th Cross Indiranagar towards the KFC Junction, swerved to avoid a two-wheeler. In the process, the SUV collided with an oncoming Renault car after jumping the median. Among the injured were the rider of the two-wheeler and five others. All were promptly taken to a nearby hospital for treatment, though the extent of their injuries remains undisclosed. The traffic police conducted a site inspection and have initiated a case to investigate the circumstances and any possible negligence involved. *—Salar News*

Elephant, Indian gaur found dead at MM Hills

MYSURU, 12 JAN

A 40-year-old female elephant was found dead near Sulekobe in Hoogyam range of MM Hills wildlife sanctuary in Chamarajanagar district on Sunday. Forest department personnel spotted the animal during their routine patrolling.Assistant conservator of forests Shivaraju, Hoogyam Range forest officer Puttaraju visited the spot and Dr Siddaraju conducted the post-mortem examination. The elephant has a natural death, the officer said In another incident, An Indian Bison was found dead after falling into a trench during its attempt to escape from a leopard inside Pacchedoddi forest in MM Hills wildlife sanctuary. Forest department personnel, who found the animal dead during routine forest patrolling, conducted the post-mortem examination of the animal after lifting it from the trench, an official statement said. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: X

Baby dies of snakebite in sugarcane field

MYSURU, 12 JAN

A two-year-old male child died after he was bit by a snake in a sugarcane field at Teramballi in Kollegal taluk on Saturday. Police identified the child as the son of Sridharaiah a migrant labourer from Ballari district.Every year, five to seven families from Ballari district camp in the village for three months for sugarcane harvesting.Though the toddler was rushed to Kollegal sub division hospital and treated for snakebite, he could not be saved, police said. Mamballi police have registered a case. *—Salar News*

Defer meet on caste census: DKS to Vokkaligas

He cautioned Sangha to refrain from internal disputes

BENGALURU, 12 JAN

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar announced on Sunday that he has urged the Vokkaliga Sangha to postpone their meeting regarding the caste census. He cautioned the office-bearers to refrain from internal disputes or risk having an administrator appointed to the Sangha.

Following a reconciliation among a faction of the new office-bearers, Shivakumar reported, "I have warned them that if squabbling continues, I will appoint an administrator in the Sangha. They have agreed to work together."

When questioned about holding a meeting with the Sangha, the Deputy CM clarified he had neither convened a meeting nor deemed it necessary. "The Sangha office-bearers had decided to hold a meeting regarding the caste census. I advised them to delay it to avoid unnecessary confusion. I also mentioned that I would consult with the seer of Adi Chunchanagiri Math, Nirmanandandatha Swami, about the matter," he stated.

The Sangha office-bearers had decided to hold a meeting regarding the caste census. I have told them to postpone the meeting as it would create unnecessary confusion. I also told them that I would talk to seer of Adi Chunchanagiri mutt Nirmanandandatha Swami about it
-DK Shivakumar, DyCM

Deputy CM DK Shivakumar clarified he had neither convened a Sangha meeting nor deemed it necessary **PHOTO: PTI**

The Vokkaliga community is a significant agrarian group in Karnataka, to which Shivakumar belongs. Tensions surrounding the caste census report have arisen, particularly following the submission of the socio-economic and education survey by K Jayaprakash Hegde, Chairperson of the Commission for Backward Classes, to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on 29 February, 2024.

State Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil noted that the cabinet would address the caste census in an upcoming meeting. Additionally, addressing a letter from Legislative Council Chairman Basavaraj Horatti regarding BJP MLC CT Ravi's allegations against Minister for Woman and Child Welfare Lakshmi Hebbalkar, Shivakumar stated that the Home Minister would respond accordingly. *—PTI*

PROTESTS ERUPT

Kalaburagi teen kills self after rape threats

KALABURAGI, 12 JAN

A tragic incident in Jevargi has sparked widespread protests following the death of a 14-year-old girl, who reportedly took her own life after receiving alleged rape threats from a 21-year-old man. The police have since arrested the suspect, identified as Mahaboob, an autorickshaw driver from Basaveshwara Nagar.

According to the girl's parents, Mahaboob had been persistently pressuring their daughter to enter a romantic relationship, and when she refused, he allegedly threatened to rape her.

They claim that his harassment caused significant emotional distress, ultimately leading to their daughter's tragic decision.

In response to the incident, members of the Akhil Bharat Veerashaiva Mahasabha, led by State Secretary Rajshekhar Sahu Siri, organised a protest at Ankadeshwar Circle in Jevargi. Hundreds of residents participated, blocking the national highway for around two hours on Sunday morning. Demonstrators called for urgent and stringent action against the accused to ensure justice for the girl and to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

Police officials addressed the crowd, urging calm and affirming their commitment to a thorough investigation. A senior officer stated, "We will ensure that justice is delivered." The community's outcry highlights the need for greater awareness and action against harassment and violence towards women and girls. *—Salar News*

VIVEKANANDA'S BIRTHDAY

Students pay floral tribute to Swami Vivekananda at the Ramakrishna Ashram in Bengaluru's Basavanagudi on his 162nd birth anniversary, on Sunday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Yaduveer ready to accept SC verdict on heritage building

MYSURU, 12 JAN

Member of Parliament Yaduveer Krishnadutta Chamaraja Wadiyar on Sunday said he will abide by the outcome of Supreme Court directions regarding restoration and renovation of century-old Devaraja Market and Lansdowne building, two major landmarks of Mysuru city.

Yaduveer was speaking to reporters after taking part a the rally organised in the city by the district unit of BJP's youth wing as part of National Youth Day.

The Mysuru MP said Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has directed officials to completely demolish and reconstruct both landmark buildings after clearing all legal disputes at the political representatives meeting in Bengaluru on Friday.

- The Mysuru MP said Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has directed officials to completely demolish and reconstruct both landmark buildings after clearing all legal disputes at the political representatives meeting in Bengaluru on Friday.

Yaduveer said that he wants both heritage buildings to be restored without demolition. Traders and several local organisations opposed to the Mysuru City Corporation's decision to demolish and reconstruct the structures have approached the Supreme Court. "However,I will abide by the Supreme Court verdict," he said.

The MP urged the state government to expedite the expansion of the Mysuru airport runaway by handing over 42 acres of land to the Airport Authority of India. He also sought the CM's help to realign irrigation canals, replace electric lines and construction of bypass near the airport and offered to get Central funds for these works. *—Salar News*

Minor returning from b'day party dies in road crash

BENGALURU, 12 JAN

A 12-year-old boy lost his life in a road accident late on Saturday night while returning home after celebrating his birthday at his elder sister's house in Hennur.

The victim, Bhanu Teja, was a resident of RT Nagar and lived with his parents, Ravi and Suma, who hailed from Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh. Bhanu was known to spend time at the Satyanjaneya Temple in the city, where he was studying the Vedas.

According to traffic police, the accident occurred around 11.20pm on Hennur Bande Main Road. Bhanu was riding pillion on a two-wheeler driven by his elder brother, Chakradharan. Their vehicle was struck by a speeding Eicher truck. The collision caused Chakradharan to lose control, resulting in both brothers falling onto the road. The truck ran over Bhanu, killing him instantly.*—Salar News*

Mysuru, Chamarajapuram stn to have rail coach restaurants

MYSURU, 12 JAN

The South Western Railway (SWR) Mysuru division is set to hold an e-auction for the allocation of two Rail Coach Restaurants at Mysuru and Chamarajapuram Railway Stations. These distinctive dining establishments, crafted from decommissioned railway coaches, promise to offer passengers and visitors a memorable dining experience, blending vintage charm with modern amenities.

The Rail Coach Restaurants will showcase the nostalgic interiors of classic railway coaches, enhanced with contemporary facilities to deliver high-quality food and refreshments.

Positioned strategically within station premises, these venues aim to cater to the culinary needs of travellers, thereby elevating their overall journey experience.

This initiative also underscores SWR's dedication to sustainability by repurposing old coaches, contributing to passenger comfort while promoting environmental stewardship.

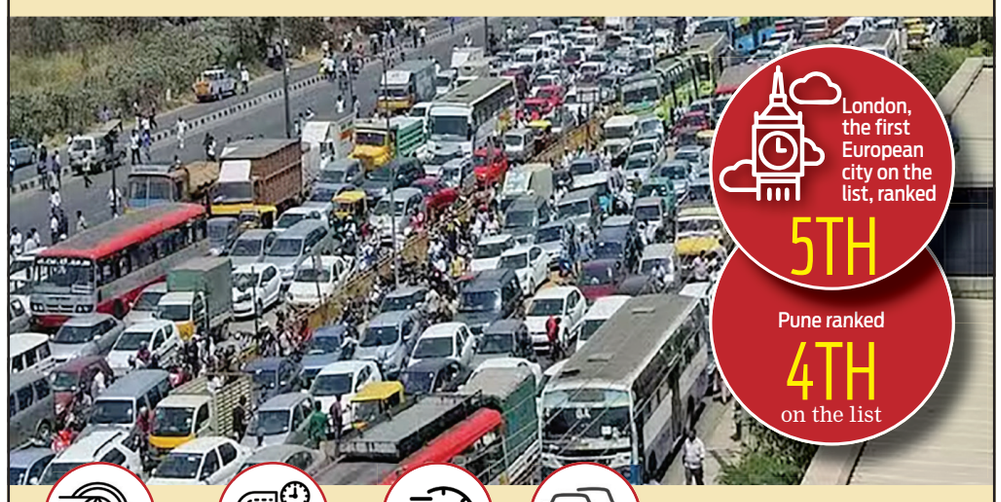
These dining establishments are crafted from decommissioned railway coaches **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

The e-auction is scheduled for 20 January at 12 noon, conducted via the IREPS portal at www.ireps.gov.in. Eligible contractors registered on the IREPS portal are invited to partake in the bidding.

Divisional Commercial Manager Girish Dharmaraj Kalagonda expressed confidence that this innovative venture will significantly enhance travel experiences for all passengers, reflecting ongoing efforts to improve amenities within the Mysuru Division. *—Salar News*

B'LURU HAS 3RD WORST TRAFFIC IN WORLD

Bengaluru ranks 3rd slowest in travel time, following Barranquilla (Colombia) and Kolkata, according to TomTom Global Traffic Index - 2024



CITY'S PREVIOUS RANKINGS
- 2023 6th
- 2022 2nd

TRAVEL TIME
Average duration for 10 km: 30mins & 10s (50 seconds slower than 2023)

AVERAGE SPEED
Average 17.6 km/h (0.5 km/h slower than 2023)

CONGESTION LEVEL
Rank 68th

WORST DAY OF TRAVEL IN CITY
- **5 Oct (Saturday):** 39 minutes 21 seconds for 10km

TRAVEL TIME DURING RUSH HOUR:
- **Morning:** 38 minutes 50 seconds for 10km
- **Evening:** 41 minutes 59 seconds for 10km

Darshan likely to lose his gun licence

BENGALURU, 12 JAN

Bengaluru police have issued a notice to actor Darshan, an accused in the Renukaswamy murder case, asking him to submit details of his licensed firearm for its cancellation.

The notice issued by Deputy Commissioner of Police (Administration) Padmini Sahoo, said, "Since you are accused in a murder case and currently out on bail, there is a suspicion that you may attempt to influence witnesses in the case using your licensed gun. Therefore, we have decided to cancel your gun licence. You are required to submit the licence along with other details of the firearm in your possession within a week of receiving this notice."

Police said the next course of action will be determined after Darshan submits the details requested for.

PHOTO: PTI

Darshan was arrested following the discovery of Chitradurga resident Renukaswamy's body in a storm-water drain in Summanahalli on 9 June. Along with Darshan, actress Pavithra Gowda and 15 others were also taken into custody. On 13 December, the High Court of Karnataka granted conditional bail to Darshan on medical grounds, as well as to Pavithra and four other accused. *—Salar News*

'POOR DIET AFFECTS HEALTH'

'66% deaths due to non-communicable diseases'

BENGALURU, 12 JAN

Health experts have revealed a troubling trend in India, where nearly two-thirds of individuals suffering from non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are aged between 26 and 59. This demographic is often at the peak of their productive years, intensifying concerns about the nation's health landscape.

NCDs, which include chronic conditions such as mental health disorders, strokes, heart disease, cancers, diabetes, and chronic lung diseases, threaten to overwhelm India's healthcare system. According to a recent report by the Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Nutrition (ICMR-NIN), unhealthy dietary practices account for a staggering 56.4 per cent of the nation's disease burden. Unlike in more developed Western nations, where NCDs typically appear later in life, Indians are developing these ailments much earlier.

Health experts addressed the 30th Continuing Medical Education seminar held in Bengaluru **PHOTO: SALAR**

The ICMR-NIN study indicates that NCDs are responsible for 66 per cent of all mortality in India. Dr Hemalatha R, former Director of ICMR-NIN, addressed attendees at the 30th Continuing Medical Education (CME) seminar held in Bengaluru. She revealed that over 50 per cent of Indians are afflicted by diet-related disorders, including type 2 diabetes, obesity, and fatty liver disease. "Poor dietary habits contribute to 56 per cent of our disease burden," she noted. During a panel discussion, Dr G Rajendiran, Head of Preventive Cardiology at PSG Institute of Medical Sciences & Research, asserted the benefits of whole-food, plant-based diets in preventing cardiovascular diseases. "A shift to plant-based nutrition is vital for sustainable health outcomes," he emphasised.

Dr Rajeena Shahin, Medical Director of PAN India, highlighted that while NCDs dominate India's mortality landscape, they are largely preventable. In light of these findings, PAN India's Bengaluru Chapter Chairperson, Dr Prathima Kini, called for nutrition to be integrated into medical education, advocating for doctors to lead by example. *—Salar News*

More arms and IEDs recovered in Manipur

IMPHAL, 12 JAN

Security forces have recovered seven firearms and explosive materials during search operations in Manipur's Churachandpur and Tengnoupal districts, police said on Sunday. During a search operation in Old Gelmol village under the Churachandpur Police Station limits, seven firearms, including one AK-56 Rifle, and one Chinese-origin hand grenade were recovered, a senior officer said. Security forces also carried out a search operation in Govajang area under the Moreh Police Station limits in Tengnoupal, and recovered two improvised explosive devices (IEDs) weighing approximately 1 kg each and one IED with almost 5kg of weight. —*PTI*

ED arrests 4 people in Bihar co-op bank scam

PATNA, 12 JAN

The Enforcement Directorate has arrested four people, including a former CEO, as part of a money laundering investigation linked to alleged embezzlement of funds at a Bihar cooperative bank promoted by an RJD MLA, official sources said on Sunday. The federal agency launched raids against RJD MLA from Ujiarpur Alok Kumar Mehta (58) and some others allegedly linked to him in Bihar on January 10 as part of the probe into alleged bungling of funds in the Vaishali Shahri Vikas (VSV) Co-operative Bank. Those arrested are former bank CEO Vipin Tiwari, his father-in-law Ram Babu Shandilya, Nitin Mehra and Sandeep Singh. The accused were produced before a PMLA court in the Bihar capital and remanded to judicial custody, sources said.—*PTI*

'B'deshis' illegal docus in M'rashtra is vote jihad part 2'

MUMBAI, 12 JAN

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday said Bangladeshi migrants seeking birth certificates illegally in the state to obtain voting rights was "vote jihad part 2". Fadnavis, during the November assembly poll campaign, had cited instances of a community voting en masse against the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections held earlier in 2024, and had termed this as "vote jihad". Speaking at the state BJP's convention in Shirdi in Ahilyanagar, Fadnavis said, "Bangladeshi infiltrators are seeking birth certificates in Maharashtra as part of vote jihad part 2. Nearly 100 such cases have been reported in Amravati and Malegaon tehsil in Nashik. These people, many aged around 50 years, are obtaining documents illegally." Not a single infiltrator will be allowed to stay in Maharashtra, the CM asserted. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Haridwar group to host 'ONOE' lecture at Maha Kumbh

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

A Haridwar-based community welfare organisation has lined up a series of seven lectures on diverse themes, including one on the contentious subject of simultaneous polls, at its camp at the Maha Kumbh site in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj on 18 January. The first in the series is slated to be held on 12 January, a day ahead of the beginning of the mega festival that will run till 26 February in Prayagraj. "A total of seven lectures will be hosted by us at our camp at the Maha Kumbh starting with a lecture on the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda on 12January. It is scheduled for 18 January is titled -- 'One Nation, One Election -- Aarthik Rajnaitik Sudhar Evam Viksit Bharat ke Sandarbh Mein'," an official of Divya Prem Seva Mission told PTI.—*PTI*

BJP will raze Delhi slums if they win: Kejri

He said BJP also plans to take over slum land without addressing housing needs

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

AAP National Convenor Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday claimed that BJP would demolish all slums in Delhi if voted to power in the upcoming Assembly elections.

The former chief minister accused the BJP of prioritising land acquisition over the welfare of slum dwellers. "They want your votes first and your land after the elections," Kejriwal said.

There was no immediate response from the BJP.

The AAP chief further challenged Union Home Minister Amit Shah to withdraw all cases against people living in huts and resettle those displaced within 24 hours, vowing not to contest the elections if the BJP complies.

"I will not contest the elections if Amit Shah withdraws all the cases against the slum dwellers or displaced people. If the BJP fails, I will contest and stand as a shield for the slum dwellers. Let's see who destroys them," Kejriwal said.

He also criticised BJP's Jahan Jhuggi Wahan Makaan scheme, calling it an eyewash.

"In the past 10 years, they have constructed only 4,700 flats for slum dwellers. Delhi has 4 lakh huts. At this rate, it will take them 1,000 years to provide homes for all slum dwellers in the city," he said.

Kejriwal also alleged that the BJP has plans to take over the land currently occupied by slum dwellers without addressing their housing needs.

"They will demolish all the slums and acquire the land without any concern for the people living there," he added.

AAP leader Manish Sisodia posted on X, "Kejriwal has exposed every lie and conspiracy by Amit Shah to the people living in 'jhuggis.' Now, it is plotting to demolish every 'jhuggi' in Delhi. People living in 'jhuggis' of Delhi, remember, this is a bulldozer party. If you vote for the BJP, all these 'jhuggis' will be demolished..." —*PTI*

Former Delhi CM and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal with party leader Satyendar Jain addresses the media, at Shakur Basti area, in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

> **AAP government in the capital failed to fulfil all of its key poll promises and destroyed the city. Arvind Kejriwal only spreads lies and did not make any effort to fulfil the promises his party made to voters**
>
> -Delhi BJP

Atishi launches crowdfunding campaign

Delhi Chief Minister and AAP candidate from Kalkaji, Atishi on Sunday launched a crowdfunding campaign to contest Delhi Assembly polls and said she hoped people would support her party's politics of work and honesty.

Atishi released an online link for people to donate money, saying she needed Rs 40 lakh to fight the elections. The AAP has always fought elections with small donations from the common man which has helped it pursue the politics of work and honesty, she said. Atishi is pitted against former MP and BJP candidate Ramesh Bidhuri —*PTI*

Congress vows ₹8,500 to jobless youths

The Congress on Sunday promised Rs 8,500 every month to educated unemployed youths in Delhi for one year if it comes to power in Delhi. This is the third scheme launched by the party.

The aid, to be provided under the Yuva Udaan Yojana, is not free, AICC general secretary Sachin Pilot said. "We will provide financial aid to youths who can show their skills. They will get money through these firms," Pilot said. The leaders also launched the poster of the scheme during the press conference. —*PTI*

EAM to represent India at Trump's inauguration

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will represent India at the inauguration of Donald Trump as the 47th President of the United States on 20 January.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Sunday that Jaishankar will also have meetings with multiple representatives of the incoming Trump administration during his visit to the US.

Trump had defeated Vice President Kamala Harris in the presidential election held in November 2023.

Last month, Jaishankar said that Trump has had a positive political view of India and that it is in a much more advantageous position than many other countries to build "deeper" relations with his administration and take the bilateral ties forward.

"On the invitation of the Trump-Vance Inaugural Committee, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will represent the Government of India at the swearing-In ceremony of President-Elect Donald J Trump as the 47th President of the United States of America," it said.

JD Vance will be the new US Vice President.

"During the visit, the external affairs minister will also have meetings with representatives of the incoming administration, as also some other dignitaries visiting the US on that occasion," the MEA said in a statement.

There have been concerns in many countries over the Trump administration's policy over a range of sensitive issues including tariff, climate change and overall foreign policy priorities against the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the situation in West Asia.

It is for the second time Trump will be the US President. He served as the 45th President of the US from January, 2017 to January 2021. —*PTI*

NDA to boycott 5 Feb TN bypoll: Annamalai

CHENNAI, 12 JAN

BJP-led NDA has decided to boycott the Erode East bypoll scheduled for 5 February and would focus on dethroning the ruling DMK in the hustings next year, the saffron party's state unit said on Sunday.

BJP's announcement virtually makes the election a no-contest as main opposition AIADMK and the DMDK have already announced boycotting the byelection, necessitated by the death of Congress MLA EVKS Elangovan. DMK has nominated VC Chandrakumar on behalf of its-led bloc, which also has the Congress in the alliance.

BJP TN chief K Annamalai said the upcoming election was a "by-election for a by-election," following the bypoll held here in 2022.

He recalled there were accusations of the ruling DMK then "confining" people at designated places.

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) faced the DMK violating poll rules due to the "arrogance" of being the ruling party.

"The coming 2026 Assembly polls is one meant to remove the DMK (from the ruling saddle) and the NDA is moving towards that target and does not want to allow the DMK to confine people like cattle once again," he said in a statement.

The state has been pushed to a "dark period" with no safety for various sections of society and the DMK government was an "anti-people" one where law and order has also failed, the former IPS officer alleged.

NDA constituents in the state include Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK). —*PTI*

BIHAR BANDH

Supporters of MP Pappu Yadav block a road during a Bihar bandh called by him in support of the students seeking cancellation of BPSC exams in Patna, on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

'Sena (UBT) never called for disbanding of INDIA or MVA'

MUMBAI, 12 JAN

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Sunday said his party wants to go solo in the local bodies polls to strengthen its base and has never called for dissolution of the opposition INDIA bloc or the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA).

Raut's remarks came a day after he cited the lack of opportunities for workers of respective parties in an alliance and the right to organisational growth as the major considerations for contesting solo, which raised a question mark over the opposition bloc's unity.

The INDIA bloc and MVA alliances include the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT), Congress, and Sharad Pawar's NCP (SP). —*PTI*

CM Stalin's arrogance is not good, says Raj Bhavan

CHENNAI, 12 JAN

The Tamil Nadu Raj Bhavan on Sunday slammed Chief Minister MK Stalin for describing as "childish", Governor RN Ravi not delivering his address to the Assembly recently, and said "such arrogance is not good".

In a social media post, it said people will not tolerate any "brazen insult" to the country and the Constitution.

"Thiru @mkstalin asserts that insisting on due respect to the National Anthem and doing fundamental duties enshrined in the Constitution is "absurd" and "childish".

Thanks for betraying the true intentions of the coalition of interests and ideologies to which he is a leader that does not accept and respect Bharat as a nation and Her Constitution. Such arrogance is not good."

PHOTO: PTI

"Please do not forget that Bharat is the supreme Mother and the Constitution the supreme faith for her children. They will not like or tolerate such brazen insult," the Raj Bhavan said on X. The response came a day after Stalin alleged Ravi was unable to "digest" that the state was developing and his decision not to address the Assembly was "childish".

- On 6 January, Ravi left the Assembly without delivering the address. Raj Bhavan later said he left 'in deep anguish' as the national anthem wasn't played.

On 6 January, Ravi left the Assembly without delivering the address. Raj Bhavan later said he left 'in deep anguish' as the national anthem wasn't played. In 2022, Ravi delivered his address without altering the speech. In the following years, he avoided delivering his customary address citing 'absurd' reasons, the Chief Minister had told the state Assembly on Saturday. —*PTI*

1 DEAD, 4 CRITICAL

WB sees protest over death from expired saline

KOLKATA, 12 JAN

The youth and students' wings of the CPI(M) on Sunday held a protest in front of the Midnapore Medical College and Hospital, demanding action against those responsible for the death of a woman at the state-run hospital.

A woman died and four others fell critically ill after the delivery of babies at the hospital in West Bengal's Paschim Medinipur district allegedly due to the administration of expired intravenous fluid, prompting the health department to order an investigation.

Leading the protest, Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI) state secretary Minakshi Mukherjee demanded that action be taken against those responsible for the death of the woman at the hospital.

The DYFI and SFI supporters staged a road blockade for some time there to press for their demands.

The family members of the deceased woman alleged that her demise was due to the administration of expired Ringer's Lactate on the intravenous (IV) fluid.

The injection is used to replace water and electrolyte loss in patients with low blood volume or low blood pressure.

The family members of the deceased lodged a complaint with the police, alleging that the hospital authorities were responsible for her death.

After the death of the woman and the deterioration of the health condition of four others, the state government has formed a 13-member panel to investigate the matter, an official said. —*PTI*

SFI-DYFI-AIDWA workers protest against a protest over the death of a woman after the delivery of a baby at a state-run hospital, in West Medinipur, on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

Youth will make India developed country: Modi

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said that the capabilities of India's young population will power the country's rise to becoming developed.

Addressing the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue in the national capital, Modi said some people may find the goal of India becoming developed difficult, but it is not impossible.

No power can stop India from becoming a developed country if the spirit of Viksit Bharat guides its every step, policy and decision, he said, highlighting the strength and numbers of the country's young population.

"Big targets have to be set for a country to march forward... This is what today's India is doing," Modi said, adding that the country is accomplishing numerous goals in different sectors ahead of time.

India has set the target of 20 per cent ethanol blending in petrol by 2030 and will meet the goal before that, he said.

The PM added that the government alone cannot drive the country forward and told youngsters drawn from across the country that the ownership in Viksit Bharat is not Modi's alone but also of them. Their ideas will be part of the country's policies and give it direction, he said.

Achieving ambitious goals requires the active participation and collective effort of every citizen of the nation, he said.

The prime minister cited the rise of the USA after 1930s' economic crisis and Singapore's rise to a major economic power to emphasise his point. —*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Search on to trace terrorists spotted near LoC in J&K

JAMMU, 12 JAN

A search operation to track down terrorists, whose movement near the Line of Control (LoC) in Akhnoor sector was reported last week, entered the second day on Sunday with forces deploying drones and other latest equipment, officials said. The operation was launched by different units of the Army in Bhattal area on Saturday after the villagers reported the suspicious movements in the Jogiwan forest. They suspected these were infiltrating terrorists. They said security forces have deployed drones and other latest equipment besides the sniffer dogs to sanitise the area, while police parties have also joined the search operation. —PTI

Govt bus knocks down 2 elderly Kerala women

THRISSUR, 12 JAN

Two elderly women on their way to the Parish church for morning prayers were struck by a state-run bus in this district on Sunday. The women were hit by a KSRTC bus while trying to cross a busy road in Ollur here, police said. The deceased were from nearby Chiyyaram. While one of the women died on the spot, another was declared dead at the hospital, the police quoted locals as saying. —PTI

PHOTO: ANI

Man dies by suicide after killing neighbour in Kerala

T'PURAM, 12 JAN

Two people were found dead at a lodge in Thampanoor here early on Sunday, police said. The deceased, who checked into the lodge on Saturday, were natives of nearby Vilappilsala. Kumar, 53, is suspected to have ended his life after killing Asha, 42, who lived in his neighbourhood, they said. "He was found hanging in the room after slitting his wrist. The body of the woman was found lying nearby," a police officer said.As per preliminary inquiry, Kumar killed Asha before ending his own life, he said. Based on a complaint from her family, a missing case was already registered at Vilappilsala police station on Saturday. —PTI

Mentally challenged woman raped by 3 men in Telangana

HYDERABAD, 12 JAN

A mentally challenged woman in her mid-30s was allegedly raped by three men in Medak of Telangana and the incident came to light while analysing CCTV footage by police in a theft case, police said on Sunday. The incident happened on 8 January night in Chegunta mandal, they said. As part of an investigation following a theft complaint, the police were verifying CCTV footage of an area. They came across footage captured by a camera wherein three men were seen forcibly taking away a woman near the roadside. Police who took up further investigation identified the three persons and picked them up and during their questioning they "revealed" that they allegedly sexually assaulted the woman. The victim, who is mentally challenged and found wandering in the area for the past three-four days, has been shifted to 'Bharosa' support centre by the police. —PTI

HMPV not new; stay calm, take precautions: Experts

Medical attention needed if cough, cold, fever persist

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

Amid growing concerns over human metapneumovirus (HMPV) cases in India, health experts have reassured the public that the virus is not new and emphasised the importance of remaining calm.

First identified in 2001, HMPV causes upper respiratory infections and spreads primarily through the air, particularly during winter and early spring.

Dr Aabid Amin Bhat, Medical Director at Ujala Cygnus Group of Hospitals, clarified that while HMPV is an emerging concern, India has not seen an unusual surge in cases. Common symptoms include cough, fever, fatigue, sore throat, body aches, and occasionally gastrointestinal issues.

Dr Madhu Nahar Roy, Director of Internal Medicine at Paras Health Udaipur, stressed preventive measures like frequent hand washing, wearing masks in crowded places, and maintaining physical distance.

Although masks are not mandatory, wearing them can help prevent the spread of HMPV PHOTO: PTI

Strengthening immunity through a healthy diet, proper sleep, and physical activity is also crucial. Testing for HMPV includes RT-PCR to detect the virus' genetic material, while antibody tests can identify past exposure. In severe cases, chest X-rays or CT scans may be advised.

India's preparedness, built on the infrastructure developed during the Covid-19 pandemic, includes rapid testing capabilities and the ability to manage outbreaks effectively, according to former ICMR Director General Dr Balram Bhargava.

"Considering the evolution of various viruses and parasites, the world will keep facing challenges of emerging health threats. In such cases, it is essential for everyone to remain vigilant and proactive," he said, while talking about the HMPV threat. Dr Ashok Kumar Singh, senior consultant at Regency Hospital, Kanpur, emphasized that public awareness and early detection are key to minimizing the spread of HMPV. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) assured that HMPV has been circulating globally, including in India, with no significant rise in influenza-like or severe acute respiratory illnesses. The government remains confident in the country's ability to manage potential increases in respiratory illnesses. —PTI

Z-MORH TUNNEL: GATEWAY TO SONAMARG

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to inaugurate the Z-Morh Tunnel in Ganderbal, Jammu and Kashmir, on Monday. This strategically crucial tunnel will provide all-weather connectivity to Ladakh via the Srinagar-Leh National Highway, replacing the old route, which was vulnerable to avalanches and often closed after snowfall.

HERE IS ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT IT:

Situated at altitude of **8,650** feet

Cost: **₹2,680** crore

- Connects Ganderbal to Sonamarg
- 6.5 km-long, 2-lane road tunnel with 10m width
- A parallel escape tunnel of 7.5m wide included for emergencies
- Can handle 1,000 vehicles per hour
- Reduces travel time to 15 mins from over two hours earlier

No end in sight as rescue enters 7th day in Assam mine

GUWAHATI, 12 JAN

Rescue operations at a flooded coal mine in Assam's Dima Hasao district continued for the seventh day on Sunday to locate trapped labourers inside the quarry, officials said.

Dewatering of the mine is being carried out with the process expected to reach the final stage soon, state Mines and Minerals Minister Kaushik Rai said.

Altogether nine workers were trapped inside the coal mine in Umrangsu area, around 250km from Guwahati, after a sudden gush of water flooded the quarry on 6 January. Of them, the bodies of four labourers have been recovered so far.

The first body was recovered on Wednesday while three others were fished out on Saturday.

NDRF team commander Roshan Kumar Singh said the water level inside the flooded mine is receding with the dewatering process going on.

The first body was recovered on Wednesday while three others were fished out on Saturday PHOTO: PTI

Rai said the final stage of dewatering is expected to reach within the next 36 hours. Twelve pumps have been engaged in the dewatering process, including in clearing water from the arterial shafts. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had said that the mine was abandoned 12 years ago and was under the Assam Mineral Development Corporation till three years ago. "It was not an illegal mine but an abandoned one. The workers had entered the mine that day for the first time to extract coal," Sarma said. —PTI

5 Naxalites killed in Chhattisgarh

BIJAPUR, 12 JAN

Five Naxalites, including two women, were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Sunday, police said.

The gunfight broke out in the morning at a forest in the Indravati National Park area when a joint team of security was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, Inspector General of Police, Bastar Range, Sundarraj P said.

After the intermittent exchange of fire stopped, bodies of three Naxalites clad in 'uniform' along with firearms, including the automatic ones, and explosives were recovered from the site, the official said.

With this, 14 Naxalites have been killed in separate encounters in 2025. On 9 January, three Naxalites were killed. Earlier, on 3 January, a Naxalite was killed in Raipur. Last year, 219 Naxalites were neutralised by security forces in separate encounters. —PTI

T'gana revokes 'Game Changer' ticket hike

HYDERABAD, 12 JAN

Hyderabad, 12 Jan

Telangana government has revoked its earlier orders allowing an increase in ticket prices for actor Ram Charan starrer 'Game Changer'.

Complying with the High Court directives, the government said early morning shows will not be permitted in future 'until public interest, health and safety are duly considered'.

The orders withdrawing permission for screening the movie with enhanced rates would be effective from 16 January, an official statement said on Saturday night.

Following a request made by the makers of 'Game Changer', the government had issued orders on 3 January permitting screening of six shows on 10 January (including extra show at 4 am) with an additional amount of Rs 150 for multiplex theatres and Rs 100 for single theatres.

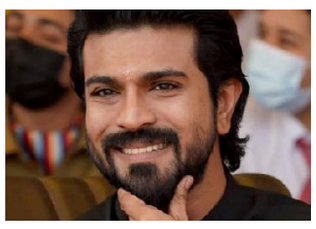


PHOTO: PTI

It also allowed screening of five shows from 11 to 19 January with an additional amount of Rs 100 for multiplex theatres and Rs 50 for single theatres.

While allowing additional shows and hike in prices, the government had said advertisements on adverse impact of narcotics and drugs and cybercrime should be screened.

However, the High Court passed interim directions on 10 January to review the decision issued. —PTI

14 arrested for rape of Dalit girl in Kerala

PATHANAMTHITTA, 12 JAN

Fourteen people have been arrested and remanded to judicial custody in connection with the alleged rape of a Dalit girl in the district, police said on Sunday.

All 14 accused have been sent to judicial custody by a court in Pathanamthitta for 14 days. Police have also taken into custody several others in connection with the rape case, they said.

Investigation is underway and more arrests will be recorded, an official said.

Meanwhile, nine FIRs were registered in two police stations in Pathanamthitta district, sources on Sunday said.

The girl, who is now 18 years old, has alleged in her complaint that she was sexually abused by 62 individuals since the age of 13.

The police said that they received evidence indicating that the girl was exploited by her sports trainers, fellow athletes and classmates.

Calling for immediate arrest of all the accused, the National Commission for Women (NCW) has sought a detailed action-taken report from authorities within three days. The Kerala Women's Commission (KWC) has registered a case and directed the Pathanamthitta Superintendent of Police to immediately submit a report in this regard, the Commission said in a The matter came to light during counselling conducted by the Child Welfare Committee, after the victim's teachers at an educational institution informed the panel about noticeable changes in her behaviour. —PTI

LANKAN NAVY NABS 8 INDIAN FISHERMEN

COLOMBO, 12 JAN

The Sri Lankan Navy on Sunday said it arrested a day ago eight Indian fishermen for allegedly fishing in the island nation's territorial waters and seized two fishing trawlers.

With this arrest, so far this year 18 Indian fishermen have been arrested and three trawlers confiscated, the navy said in a statement.

"The operation resulted in the seizure of 2 Indian fishing boats and apprehension of 8 Indian fishermen who continued to remain in Sri Lankan waters," it said.

The seized boats together with the Indian fishermen were brought to the island of Iranativu and they will be handed over to the Assistant Directorate of Fisheries, Kilinochchi, for legal proceedings, the Navy said. —PTI

The rescue teams worked through the cold night to clear the debris and safely pull out the trapped workers PHOTO: PTI

UP building collapse: 28 workers rescued

KANNAUJ, 12 JAN

The rescue operation at the Kannauj Railway Station, following a building collapse, concluded Sunday morning with rescuers pulling out 28 workers safely after a 16-hour operation through the night, officials said.

They said all the rescued workers have been admitted to a hospital for treatment. No fatalities have been reported. The shuttering of the under-construction building had collapsed Saturday afternoon, trapping the workers. The rescue teams worked through the cold night to clear the debris and safely pull out the trapped workers. CCTV footage shows a labourer attempting to fix the shutter-in. It suggests that a beam carried by the worker hit the shuttering, causing it to slip and ultimately collapse. —PTI

Govt mulls norms for weather forecast units

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

The government wants to establish a permanent framework to continue the work of district agrometeorological units (DAMUs), which had been operating in an ad-hoc manner until their closure last year, Ministry of Earth Sciences Secretary M Ravichandran has said.

It was reported in August last year that the government intended to revive the DAMUs, which provided block-level weather-related information to lakhs of farmers, before their closure last year following recommendations from Niti Aayog.

A source said the Earth Sciences Ministry has also written to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's office about the importance of reviving the DAMUs and also voiced concerns related to their closure. —PTI

35 CR DEVOTEES EXPECTED

Maha Kumbh hosts world's largest gathering

PRAYAGRAJ, 12 JAN

The Maha Kumbh 2025, set to begin on January 13, is expected to be the largest gathering of humanity, spanning 45 days, at the Sangam in Prayagraj, where the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers meet. This edition, occurring after 12 years, is considered particularly auspicious due to celestial alignments taking place once every 144 years. The Uttar Pradesh government anticipates a record 35 crore devotees, with 25 lakh already arriving for the holy dip on January 10.

The event will be a blend of spirituality and modernity, dubbed a "Digi-Kumbh," with significant use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for enhanced security and services. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath highlighted the event's role in promoting India's spiritual heritage globally, emphasizing its cleanliness, security, and technological advancements, including AI-powered security and digital tourist maps.

Sadhus take part in a procession towards Sangam ahead of Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, in Prayagraj, on Sunday PHOTO: PTI

Over 55 police stations and 45,000 personnel have been deployed, alongside projects for social media monitoring. The event, spanning 10,000 acres, is expected to host up to 1 crore devotees at any time, with the area being transformed into the world's largest temporary city.

Thirteen Akharas, representing various sects, are participating, attracting pilgrims seeking spiritual knowledge. The city is adorned with religious symbols, and themed entry gates and 30 pontoon bridges have been set up to manage the crowds. This year's Maha Kumbh also holds special significance following the consecration of Lord Ram's idol in Ayodhya in 2024. The occasion coincides with National Youth Day, drawing the younger generation to embrace their cultural roots. —PTI

Kerala priests booked for 'attacking' cop

KOCHI, 12 JAN

A case was registered against 20 priests on Sunday for allegedly assaulting a police officer during a protest at the Bishop's House of the Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese on 11 January.

The Ernakulam central police registered a case against the priests, who are identifiable, under sections 189(2), 190, 191(2), and 121(2) of the BNS, said a police officer.

The charges include unlawful assembly, rioting, and causing hurt or grievous hurt to deter a public servant from performing their duty, he added.

The FIR was registered based on a complaint by Anoop C, Sub Inspector of Central Police, who sustained injuries while managing the protesters during the law-and-order operation.

Meanwhile, Archbishop Mar Joseph Pamplany, appointed as the Vicar of the Major Archbishop for the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly in the wake of the protest, on Sunday urged the protesters to resolve the issue amicably through open dialogues.

Responding to the ongoing controversy over the unified Holy Mass, Pamplany told the media that altering a decision approved by Pope Francis is impossible.

A large posse of police personnel has been deployed outside the Bishop House on Sunday also —PTI

NATIONAL YOUTH DAY

Students dressed as Swami Vivekananda take part in the Hindu monk and philosopher's birth anniversary celebrations, in Kolkata, on Sunday. This day, celebrated as National Youth Day, is dedicated to inspiring and encouraging the younger generation to strive towards their personal growth as well as societal progress ***PHOTO: PTI***

Probe agencies face court wrath over 'illegal' arrests

A series of court orders here recently directing for the release of accused citing "illegal arrest" have come as a setback for probe agencies, with prosecution lawyers calling for a balanced approach while defence counsels insist on following norms.

In most of these cases, the arrests were without "application of mind," a defence counsel claimed, while the prosecution lawyers batted for victims' rights.

In December 2024, the Central Bureau of Investigation arrested six people, including two IRS officers, in a bribery case, but a special court here denied the CBI custody of the accused after finding their arrest as "illegal" and ordered their immediate release.

Over the last six months, several remand pleas of probe agencies, such as CBI, Enforcement Directorate (ED) and local police, in courts here have met the same fate.

Over the last six months, several remand pleas of probe agencies, such as CBI, Enforcement Directorate (ED) and local police, in courts have met the same fate ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

In most cases, the defence's submission was centred around the probe agencies not following the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita provisions, like not maintaining case diary properly, not providing the ground of arrest to the accused immediately or not producing him in court within 24 hours of the arrest.

Speaking to PTI, advocate Rahul Agarwal, who has appeared for a few accused persons, claimed, "They (investigation agencies) are not following provisions laid down in the law and guidelines set by the apex court and high courts in letter and spirit."

"The Supreme Court's guidelines clearly state that there needs to be a physical ground of arrest given to the accused or the arrest will be declared illegal," he said.

In the bribery matter against IRS officers, the special CBI court noted the case diary had loose sheets of papers, which amounts to contravention of the provisions of law, as per a ruling of the Bombay High Court ruling.

The court said it is necessary for the investigation officer to ensure all case papers are maintained properly.

In another jolt to the CBI, the court refused it the transit remand of ED officer Vishal Deep arrested in a bribery case, noting "the prosecution's failure to produce the case diary shakes its case".

The court held it as a "serious lapse" while rendering the arrest illegal.

The ED was also left embarrassed last year when a special PMLA court set free businessman Purushottam Mandhana, accused in a money laundering case, for not providing the ground of arrest and copy of "reasons to believe" that he is guilty of the offence.

Local police have also faced rejection of their remand pleas by courts on accounts of arrest not being proper.

A magistrate court here recently ordered the release of a man booked for allegedly posting online a manipulated video of Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis's recent speech on Naxalism.

In a solace for police, a sessions court last month came down heavily on a magistrate for taking a "hyper technical view" while declaring the arrest of rape accused film producer Gunwant Jain as "illegal", as the police were late by just four minutes in communicating the ground of arrest to the accused.

The sessions court ordered the accused to surrender before police.

Senior advocate Satish Maneshinde said in most of these cases the arrests were "mechanical" without "application of mind".

However, batting for a balanced approach, lawyers representing the state are of the opinion that victims' rights are equally important.

Why should a victim suffer if the investigation agencies have made a mistake? they asked.

Senior special prosecutor Ujjwal Nikam, who has represented the state in various high profile cases including the 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts case, vouched for a balanced approach and said probe agencies should also get an opportunity for custodial interrogation of the accused.

Special Public Prosecutor Shishir Hire batted for victims' rights.

Advocate Jitendra Sharma, who has represented the CBI in several cases, said if such cases are decided by the judiciary, then how will an investigation agency proceed with the probe in matters of "collusive corruption", where private and public servants are "hand-in-glove".

"Arrest is illegal or legal, it is the prerogative of the judiciary. Simultaneously, the probe agency also has to conduct the investigation in a fair manner and that chance should be provided by it, otherwise it will create a bottleneck in the investigation," he added. *—PTI*

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SALAR سالار

Delhi polls: Parties woo women voters with cash

Ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls, all major parties seem to be wooing women voters with direct cash transfers.

Major political contenders, BJP, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and Indian National Congress, have each promised financial assistance schemes for women, a demographic that constitutes 46.2 per cent of Delhi's electorate.

According to the final electoral roll published by the Office of the Delhi Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) on 6 January, the national capital has a total of 1,55,24,858 registered voters, comprising 83,49,645 male voters and 71,73,952 female voters.

In a bid to woo the female voters and as a countermeasure to AAP's welfare-centric campaign, BJP has proposed a monthly aid of Rs 2,500 for women. AAP, under the Mahila Samman Yojana, has pledged Rs 2,100 per month to women, continuing its strategy of offering direct benefits to secure electoral support.

Not to be left behind, the Congress has introduced the 'Pyari Didi Yojana,' promising Rs 2,500 monthly to women if elected, mirroring similar initiatives it has implemented in other states.

These announcements have had a tangible impact on voter registration dynamics. Between 16 December and 6 January, Delhi's Chief Electoral Office received an unprecedented 5.1 lakh applications for new voter registrations, with nearly 70 per cent (approximately 3.4 lakh) submitted by women.

The promise of monthly financial aid has sparked mixed reactions among women voters in Delhi, reflecting diverse needs and priorities. While many see the schemes as a welcome relief, others question their sustainability and long-term impact.

Nisha Verma, a homemaker in East Delhi, shared, "Rs 2,500 a month may not seem like much, but it could mean an extra set of books for my children or a small saving for emergencies. These schemes are helpful, but I also wonder if they are just election-time promises that might not be delivered."

Priya Sharma, a young professional from South Delhi, expressed a different perspective. "I appreciate the focus on women, but I would rather see schemes that create job opportunities or improve public safety for women. Monthly cash handouts might help temporarily, but they don't solve larger problems."

Rukhsar Ansari, a resident of Old Delhi, welcomed the initiative but with caution. "It's a good step, especially for women like me who run small businesses. Even a small amount can help us invest in our work. But I feel politicians remember us only during elections. What happens after they win?"

For Asha Kumari, a domestic worker from West Delhi, these schemes offer some hope amidst economic challenges. "The money promised by these schemes can ease our struggles, especially with rising prices. But instead of just cash, they should also focus on better schools for our children and affordable healthcare for families."

Geeta Devi, a senior citizen from Rohini emphasised the importance of such schemes for financial independence. "For women like me who don't have any source of income, these schemes could provide a little financial independence. But I hope the government doesn't cut other benefits like subsidised food to fund these payments."

These voices reflect the nuanced views of women voters, highlighting that while direct financial aid is valued, broader systemic improvements remain a key demand.

As Delhi heads to the polls in February, the emphasis on direct cash transfers to women underscores the growing recognition of their electoral significance. Whether these financial promises will translate into votes remains to be seen. However, their prominence in campaign strategies highlights a pivotal shift towards gender-focused electoral appeals in the capital's political arena. *—PTI*

In a bid to woo the female voters and as a countermeasure to AAP's welfare-centric campaign, BJP has proposed a monthly aid of Rs 2,500 for women. AAP, under the Mahila Samman Yojana, has pledged Rs 2,100 per month to women ***PHOTOS: PTI***

Islamic state: Despite Caliphate's fall, group still influences terrorism

At 3.15am on New Year's Day, a 42-year-old US citizen and army veteran from Texas called Shamsud-Din Jabbar drove a rented pickup truck into a crowd on Bourbon Street in New Orleans, killing 15 people and injuring at least 35 more.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) called the attack an "act of terrorism" and said that Jabbar appeared to have been motivated by the Islamic State (IS) terrorist organisation. The group's infamous black flag was recovered from the back of his vehicle, and he had posted videos online proclaiming his support for IS.

We do not know whether Jabbar, who was fatally shot by police, was a genuine IS operative. But the style of his attack was consistent with those committed on behalf of the group in the past. Vehicles were used to target civilians in the 2017 attack on London's Westminster Bridge, as well as in Berlin and the French city of Nice in 2016.

Jabbar's attack demonstrates the resilience of IS despite its lack of territorial control, as well as its commitment to inspire lone-wolf attacks in an attempt to gain widespread coverage.

IS gained global attention in 2014 when it captured large parts of Iraq and Syria and established a so-called Islamic caliphate. Between 2014 and 2016, when the group was at the height of its powers, IS spread fear worldwide and managed to recruit thousands of men and women from nearly 80 countries.

Ten organisations classified as "IS affiliates" by the US National Counterterrorism Centre committed more than 1,000 attacks combined during this period.

By 2019, IS had lost all of its territory due to the efforts of a US-led military coalition, alongside Kurdish and Iraqi forces. However, the group had already begun preparing for a new structure.

The group transitioned towards a more clandestine network of decentralised cells, and takes advantage of unstable states primarily in sub-Saharan Africa to facilitate the movement of weapons, equipment and fighters.

IS has continued to focus on the mobilisation and online recruitment of men and women to sustain its operations, too. This is done almost entirely through the dissemination of information and propaganda online. The result has been several high-profile attacks by recruits of the group and its affiliates over the past few years, including on Moscow's Crocus City Hall concert venue in March 2024, which resulted in the deaths of 145 people.

On New year day, 42-year-old US citizen and army veteran from Texas called Shamsud-Din Jabbar drove a rented pickup truck into a crowd (IS inspired) in New Orleans, killing 15 people and injuring at least 35 ***PHOTOS: UN***

Intelligence agencies have foiled many more. In August, for example, three Taylor Swift concerts in Vienna, Austria, were cancelled after the authorities arrested two people who were allegedly planning an attack. The suspects had been radicalised by extremist Islamist propaganda from IS and Al-Qaida.

Challenges moving forward

Jabbar's attack demonstrated an ability to keep up with technological developments. Security camera footage shows Jabbar cycling through the Bourbon Street area a few months before the attack while filming on Meta smart glasses to record a video. This enabled Jabbar to become familiar with the area and assess its security measures.

On the day of the attack itself, Jabbar also drove an electric truck. This enabled him to cause as many casualities as possible as electric vehicles can accelerate faster than their gas-powered counterparts. The use of emerging technologies by terrorists clearly presents a significant challenge for law enforcement and intelligence officials moving forward.

Another important point to consider is Jabbar's background in the US military. The involvement of military personnel in far-right extremism and terrorism has become an increasing concern over recent years. Research has found that the proportion of terrorist attacks in the US involving people with a military background jumped from 0.8 per cent in 2018 to 6.4 per cent in 2020.

The attack on the US Capitol Building on 6 January, 2021 brought the issue of extremism within the armed forces firmly into the spotlight. A former air force officer called Larry Brock was sentenced to two years in prison in 2023 for his role in the riots. Of the 400 people who have been sentenced for their role in the attack, at least 70 had served in the military.

Similarly, in 2022, a German soldier named Franco Albrecht was found guilty of plotting to carry out attacks on senior politicians and anti-racist activists while posing as a Syrian refugee, hoping the blame would be placed on migrants. Albrecht's case triggered an attempt to seek out more far-right networks in the German military.

At the time of writing, there is not much information about how Jabbar himself became radicalised. But there is enough evidence to suggest that radicalisation is not a linear process and differs from one person to another. It could happen to anyone and individuals may not even realise the process they have gone through.

Causes of radicalisation vary. They are not limited to people with certain types of vulnerabilities or grievances, and cannot be attributed to people with mental health issues. This is simply because not everyone experiencing mental health problems or grievances will resort to violence to address their problems.

The FBI continues to gather information about the motive behind the attack and Jabbar's potential affiliations with terrorist groups. But the findings related to the technology he used and his military background of highlight the challenge states face moving forward in their efforts to combat and eliminate the threat posed by terrorism. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Croatian President expected to win re-election

ZAGREB, 12 JAN

Croatians are voting in a presidential run-off election, with incumbent Zoran Milanovic expected to win a second term in office in what would be a blow to the ruling Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) party, which backs his rival. Milanovic, an outspoken critic of Western military support for Ukraine against Russia, won 49.1 percent of the vote during the contest's first round two weeks ago – narrowly missing an outright victory. The 58-year-old leader entered the contest with surging momentum as he faced off against Dragan Primorac, who managed to garner 19.35 percent of the votes. Primorac, 59, is backed by the HDZ party, which has governed the former Yugoslav republic since declaring independence in 1991. *—Agencies*

Toll rises to 11 in Balochistan coal mine collapse

KARACHI, 12 JAN

A coal mine collapse in Balochistan's Sanjdi area has resulted in the tragic deaths of eleven workers, with seven bodies recovered by rescue teams. The incident occurred on Wednesday evening when twelve miners were trapped due to a methane gas explosion, approximately 40 kilometres from Quetta. Despite intensive rescue efforts, Abdullah Shawani, head of the provincial mining department, expressed concern for the survival of the twelfth worker, stating, "There are little chances of the last worker surviving for so long." The Balochistan government announced an investigation into the adherence to mining regulations, with local officials, including Pir Muhammad Kakar of the miners' association, blaming regulatory failures. *—PTI*

Bangladesh eases visa process for Pakistanis

LAHORE, 12 JAN

The interim government in Bangladesh has simplified the visa process for Pakistanis to further strengthen trade and economic relations. The present government had removed the need for clearance from Dhaka for Pakistani heads of missions while issuing visas, Bangladesh High Commissioner to Pakistan Iqbal Hussain told the business community here at the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Saturday. Hussain said the interim government headed by Chief Adviser Mohammad Yunus is eager to improve relations with Pakistan, which have been less than satisfactory over the past decade. He said Bangladesh represents a significant consumer market that Pakistan has the potential to tap. *—PTI*

Singapore Airlines: Flights delayed due to bad weather

SINGAPORE, 12 JAN

Several Singapore Airlines (SIA) flights continue to be delayed or retimed due to the ongoing inclement weather in Singapore and the region, the carrier said in a statement on Sunday. "This (inclement weather) is expected to continue through the weekend," it said. The carrier said it apologises to all customers for the inconvenience caused. "We seek their understanding that the safety of our customers and crew is always our top priority. We will continue to closely monitor the situation and make appropriate adjustments to our flights where necessary," the carrier said. More than 50 Singapore Airlines flights over the two days (10-11 January) were delayed due to the inclement weather, said a spokesman. *—PTI*

Bibi sends Mossad Chief to Qatar for Gaza truce talks

There is US pressure for a deal before Trump's inauguration

GAZA STRIP, 12 JAN

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is sending the director of the Mossad foreign intelligence agency David Barnea to ceasefire negotiations in Qatar, in a sign of progress in talks on the war in Gaza.

It was not immediately clear when Barnea would travel to Qatar's capital, Doha, for the latest round of indirect talks between Israel and the Hamas militant group, but there is US pressure for a deal before the presidential inauguration on 20 January. Barnea's presence means high-level Israeli officials who would need to sign off on any agreement are now involved.

Just one brief ceasefire has been achieved in 15 months of war, and that was in the earliest weeks of fighting. The talks mediated by the US, Egypt and Qatar have repeatedly stalled since then.

Under discussion is a phased ceasefire, with Netanyahu signalling he is committed only to the first phase, a partial hostage release in exchange for a weekslong halt in fighting.

Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with Director of Mossad Foreign Intelligence Agency David Barnea PHOTO: X

Hamas has insisted on a full Israeli troop withdrawal from the largely devastated territory but Netanyahu has insisted on destroying Hamas' ability to fight in Gaza. On Thursday, Gaza's Health Ministry said over 46,000 Palestinians have been killed in the war, the majority women and children, though it doesn't say how many were fighters or civilians.

The office also released a photo showing Netanyahu with President-elect Donald Trump's incoming special envoy to the Middle East, Steve Witkoff, who was in Qatar this week.

Families of the roughly 100 hostages still held in Gaza after being seized in the 7 October, 2023, militant attack that sparked the war are pressing Netanyahu to reach a deal to bring their loved ones home. Israelis rallied again Saturday night in Tel Aviv, with photos of hostages on display.

The recovery of two hostages' bodies in the past week renewed fears that time is running out. Hamas has said that after months of heavy fighting, it isn't sure who is alive or dead.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said this week a deal is "very close" and he hoped to complete it before handing over diplomacy to the incoming Trump administration. *—PTI*

UKRAINE-RUSSIA WAR

The two captured soldiers being taken to Kyiv PHOTO: X

Ukraine captures 2 North Korean soldiers in Russia

KYIV, 12 JAN

- While Ukraine had claimed to have captured North Korean soldiers in combat, it said they had been badly wounded and died shortly afterwards

Ukraine says it has captured two North Korean soldiers in Russia's Kursk region and taken them to Kyiv, where investigators were questioning them.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the two prisoners of war were "communicating" with the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), the country's domestic intelligence agency.

Ukraine's SBU said in a statement that one of the captured soldiers had no documents at all, while the other had been carrying a Russian military ID card in the name of a man from Tuva, a Russian region bordering Mongolia.

"The prisoners do not speak Ukrainian, English or Russian, so communication with them takes place through Korean translators in cooperation with South Korean intelligence," the statement said.

According to the SBU, one of the soldiers claimed he had been told he was going to Russia for training, rather than to fight against Ukraine.

The agency said both men were provided with medical care in line with the Geneva Conventions.

Kyiv has repeatedly said North Korean troops are fighting in the Kursk region, where it launched an incursion in August, claiming control over several hundred square kilometres of territory.

This is the first time that the country's intelligence services said they have had the opportunity to question North Korean soldiers. While Ukraine had claimed to have captured North Korean soldiers in combat, it said they had been badly wounded and died shortly afterwards. The estimate of North Korean casualties came weeks after Ukraine announced that Pyongyang had sent 10,000 to 12,000 soldiers to Russia to help it in its almost three-year war against its much smaller neighbour. *—Agencies*

Death toll rises to 16 in LA wildfires

LOS ANGELES, 12 JAN

The Los Angeles County medical examiner's office has confirmed a rising death toll from the wildfires that have been devastating the region, now standing at 16. The coroner's office reported that five fatalities were linked to the Palisades Fire and 11 to the Eaton Fire.

Initial reports indicated 11 confirmed deaths, but authorities anticipated that number to climb as teams, aided by cadaver dogs, continue searching through the wreckage of decimated neighbourhoods. A centre has been established for families to report missing people. In Mandeville Canyon, where many celebrities reside, helicopters have been dropping water as emergency crews battle the blazes. The wildfires have scorched approximately 56 square miles, destroying over 12,000 structures. With damage estimates reaching between USD 135 billion and USD 150 billion, these fires might be the costliest in US history.

Firefighters watch as water is dropped on the Palisades Fire in Mandeville Canyon in Los Angeles PHOTO: PTI

Community spirit shone with numerous volunteers offering assistance at donation centres. However, officials continue to urge residents to stay away from burned properties due to potential toxic materials. Investigations into leadership failures regarding firefighting resources are underway as the crisis escalates. *—PTI*

Trump prosecutor Jack Smith steps down

WASHINGTON DC, 12 JAN

Jack Smith, the special counsel who led two federal cases against Donald Trump, has left the United States Department of Justice before the Republican president-elect is inaugurated on January 20 for a second term.

The two cases involve Trump's alleged mishandling of classified documents after he left the White House and efforts to overturn his 2020 election defeat. Trump was indicted in both cases overseen by Smith.

After Trump defeated Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris in the 5 November election, Smith dropped both cases, citing a longstanding Justice Department rule against prosecuting sitting presidents. Smith's departure is another marker of the collapse of the criminal cases against Trump, which could end without any legal consequences for the incoming president and led to a backlash that helped fuel his political comeback.

Jack Smith PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Meanwhile, Trump, who called Smith "deranged" and said he would fire him upon taking office, has suggested that he may pursue retribution against Smith and others who investigated him once he returns to office. *—Agencies*

Pope gets Presidential Medal of Freedom

WASHINGTON DC, 12 JAN

US President Joe Biden has honoured Pope Francis with the Presidential Medal of Freedom with distinction, the highest civilian accolade available, describing the pontiff as "a light of faith, hope, and love those shines brightly across the world."

The White House confirmed that Biden conferred the honour during a phone call with the Pope, where they discussed promoting peace and alleviating global suffering. Biden is set to leave office on 20 January. *—PTI*

Denmark sends messages to Trump team on Greenland

COPENHAGEN, 12 JAN

Denmark sent private messages in recent days to US president-elect Donald Trump's team expressing willingness to discuss boosting security in Greenland or increasing the US military presence on the island, two sources with knowledge of the issue tell Axios.

Trump has repeatedly declared that controlling Greenland — the world's largest island — is necessary for US national security vis-a-vis Russia and China. His son Donald Jr. visited Greenland this week bearing MAGA hats.

The Danish government wants to convince Trump, including through the messages passed to his advisers this week, that his security concerns can be addressed without claiming Greenland for the US.

Jack Smith PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

In the messages passed to the Trump team, the Danish government made clear Greenland was not for sale but expressed readiness to discuss any other US request regarding the island, the sources said.

Danish officials have already said they are looking into further measures to increase investment in military infrastructure and capabilities in Greenland, in consultation with the Greenlandic government. *— Courtesy,Axios*

Six killed in Czech restaurant explosion

CZECH, 12 JAN

Six people were killed in a devastating explosion at a restaurant in the northwestern city of Most, Czech Republic, on Sunday, with another eight sustaining injuries from the blast. Emergency services reported that the explosion was likely triggered by an overturned heater, which ignited a fire at the Kojot restaurant.

According to the fire brigade, a propane-butane cylinder detonated during the incident. Witnesses indicated that the overturned heater was the catalyst for the blaze. Fire crews quickly mobilised, with twelve units responding to the emergency. One patron was rescued from a toilet where they had been trapped.Around 30 individuals were evacuated from the restaurant and its vicinity, while the injured were transported to local hospitals. Reports suggest approximately 20 guests were present at the time of the explosion. *—DW News*

Linkedln stopped Suchir's friend from tagging him on posts: Mother

CALIFORNIA, 12 JAN

Microsoft-owned Linkedln prevented a friend of OpenAl whistleblower Suchir Balaji, who was found dead in his San Francisco flat in November, from tagging him on a post a week before his death, his mother Poornima Ramarao claimed. "So, there are forces at work," she said. "[The friend] has been trying to ... post (Suchir's) accomplishments on Linkedln. Suspiciously, he has been blocked," Poornima added.

Speaking to an influencer on X, Rao accused OpenAI of failing to recognise her son's contributions to their flagship product, ChatGPT. "He did something to fine-tune ChatGPT that made it faster and more efficient," she told X user Mario Nawfal. "But what bothered him was that there was no recognition for his work until he passed away. Even now, there's no acknowledgement from OpenAI of his contributions. That's very unfortunate." Balaji resigned in August 2023 after expressing dissatisfaction with the company's shift to a for-profit model. According to his mother, this shift was a key factor in his decision to leave. *—Agencies*

PHOTO: MEDIAL.APP

DRIVEN BY GLOBAL TRENDS

UK borrowing costs soar since 2008 crisis

LONDON, 12 JAN

UK government borrowing costs have surged to their highest levels since the banking crisis of 2007-08, posing significant challenges for Chancellor Rachel Reeves as she navigates the government's tax and spending plans. The yield on ten-year gilts reached 4.82 per cent, the highest since 2008, while 30-year gilt yields hit 5.383 per cent, a peak not seen in 27 years.

This rise in yields, which occurs when bond prices fall, is primarily driven by increased government borrowing. Following Reeves' announcement of substantial borrowing and tax increases to stimulate economic growth during her October budget, the overall supply of government debt has risen sharply.

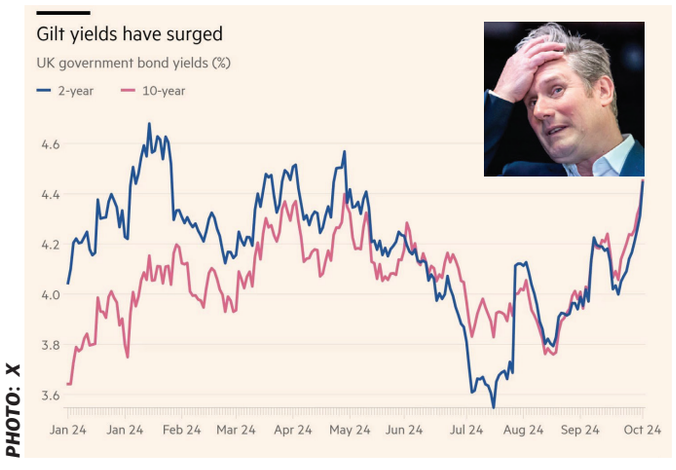


PHOTO: X

The budget deficit is projected to reach 4.5 per cent of GDP this fiscal year

The budget deficit is projected to reach 4.5 per cent of GDP this fiscal year, pushing total government debt close to 100 per cent of GDP.

Global trends also influence UK borrowing costs, with major economies like the US and France facing similar challenges. US Treasury yields have risen to 4.7 per cent, reflecting expectations of higher borrowing under the incoming Trump administration, while France's borrowing costs have surged as it struggles with budget measures. Inflation in the UK rose to 2.6 per cent in December, leaving bond investors wary of increased rate hikes and a potential spike in commodity prices due to ongoing geopolitical tensions.

The implications for the UK budget are significant. With more than 8 per cent of government spending earmarked for debt servicing in 2023-24, rising interest payments may compel Reeves to implement further tax increases. *—PTI*

Sudan army advances to retake Wad Madani City

KHARTOUM, 12 JAN

The Sudanese military and allied armed groups have entered Wad Madani, pushing out the rival Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary from the strategic city in Gezira state, according to the army.

In a statement the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) "congratulated" people on "our forces entering the city of Wad Madani this morning" after more than a year of RSF control.

"They are now working to clean up the remaining rebel pockets inside the city," the statement said.

The office of SAF-allied government spokesperson and Information and Culture Minister Khalid al-Aiser said the army had "liberated" the city.

The army posted a video that appears to show soldiers inside the city the RSF had held since December 2023.

PHOTO: X

Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, the RSF leader acknowledged defeat but insisted that the battle was not over. He attributed the defeat to army's reliance on Iranian drones and fighters from Ethiopia's Tigray region. The SAF and the RSF have been at war since April 2023, causing what the United Nations calls the world's worst displacement crisis and declarations of famine in parts of the Northeast African country. *—Agencies*

India's coal import rises 2% to 182 MT in Apr-Nov period

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

India's coal import rose by two per cent to 182.02 million tonnes (MT) in the April-November period of the current fiscal year. The country's coal import was at 178.17 MT in the year-ago period, according to data compiled by business-to-business e-commerce company mjunction services ltd. However, the country's coal import dropped to 19.57 MT in the month of November, over 22.30 MT in the corresponding month of the previous fiscal. The government had earlier stressed on augmenting coal production and reducing the imports of dry-fuel. As per the present import policy, coal can be freely imported by the consumers themselves considering their needs, based on their commercial prudence.—*PTI*

Godrej Properties acquires 24 acres in Indore for Rs 200 cr

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

Real estate company Godrej Properties has purchased a 24-acre land parcel in Indore for around Rs 200 crore to develop housing plots, as part of its strategy to expand business amid strong demand for residential properties. Godrej Properties, one of the leading real estate developers in the country, focuses on Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), Delhi-NCR, Pune and Bengaluru markets for group housing projects. For residential plotted development projects, the company has been buying land in tier II-III cities. Godrej Properties has acquired a 24-acres land parcel in Indore. The company did not divulge the total cost of the land, however, market sources said the land has been purchased at around Rs 200 crore—*PTI*

Coal India looks to Argentina for lithium brine assets

KOLKATA, 12 JAN

Coal India Ltd (CIL) has set its sights on Argentina as a destination in its strategic diversification into critical minerals, with a focus on lithium brine assets, an official said on Sunday. Recognising the economic significance and strategic value of minerals like lithium (Li), nickel (Ni), cobalt (Co), and others, the Maharatna company has initiated steps to explore opportunities in key resource-rich nations such as Argentina, Australia and Chile. The selected consultant will undertake due diligence, an initial review process to assess the financial, strategic, and geological viability of the identified assets, he said. Lithium brine is a concentrated salt solution that contains dissolved lithium and other minerals. —*PTI*

Indian Gas Exchange plans to offer 3-6 month contracts

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

The Indian Gas Exchange (IGX) has sought regulatory approvals to launch 3-6 month gas contracts benchmarked to international gas prices, its chief executive Rajesh Kumar Mediratta said. IGX currently allows gas suppliers to sell the fuel on the exchange for durations ranging from daily, weekly, fortnightly and monthly. It also offers intraday trading at a fixed price. Mediratta said the exchange has applied to the regulator, Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB), for permission to launch three-month and six-month delivery contracts indexed to gas benchmarks such as FIXI and Platts JKM, WIM and Dated Brent. IGX has also signed a MoU with Austria's Central Europeans Gas Hub to explore gas trading opportunities, including those for green gases such as hydrogen and methane. —*PTI*

FPIs withdraw Rs 22,194 cr in Jan amid rising dollar

Int'l investors reduced Indian investments amid headwinds

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

Foreign investors have withdrawn Rs 22,194 crore from Indian equities this month, driven by expectations of a weak earnings season, a steady rise in the US dollar, and concerns over tariff war during Donald Trump's presidency.

This came following an investment of Rs 15,446 crore in the month of December, data with the depositories showed.

Foreign investors have scaled back their investments in Indian equities significantly amid global and domestic headwinds.

"This exodus of foreign money from the Indian markets could be attributed to multitude of factors, such as expectation of yet another weak earning season, concerns over the tariff war under Trump's presidency, slowdown in GDP growth, still high inflation numbers and uncertainty over the commencement of the interest cut in India," Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director, Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

This came following an investment of Rs 15,446 cr in December ***PHOTO: PTI***

- According to the data, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) offloaded shares worth Rs 22,194 crore from Indian equities so far this month (till 10 January)

Additionally, record low level of Indian rupee, surge in US bond yields coupled with rich valuation of Indian markets also makes Indian equities relatively unattractive for foreign investors.

According to the data, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) offloaded shares worth Rs 22,194 crore from Indian equities so far this month (till January 10).

The overall trend indicates a cautious approach by foreign investors, who scaled back investments in Indian equities significantly in 2024, with net inflows of just Rs 427 crore. —*PTI*

HDFC BANK MOST HIT

Mcap of 5 of top-10 firms tumbles Rs 1.85 lakh crore

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

The combined market valuation of five of the top-10 most-valued firms tumbled Rs 1,85,952.31 crore last week, with HDFC Bank taking the biggest hit, in-line with a weak trend in domestic equities.

Last week, the BSE benchmark slumped 1,844.2 points or 2.32 per cent, and the Nifty dropped 573.25 points or 2.38 per cent.

While Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India and ITC faced erosion from their market valuations, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Bharti Airtel, Infosys, Hindustan Unilever and the latest entrant in the top-10 pack -- HCL Technologies, were the gainers.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of HDFC Bank dropped by Rs 70,479.23 crore to Rs 12,67,440.61 crore.

The Kolkata-based diversified entity ITC's valuation tumbled Rs 46,481 crore to Rs 5,56,583.44 crore.

The mcap of State Bank of India slumped Rs 44,935.46 crore to Rs 6,63,233.14 crore and that of Reliance Industries eroded by Rs 12,179.13 crore to Rs 16,81,194.35 crore.

ICICI Bank's valuation declined by Rs 11,877.49 crore to Rs 8,81,501.01 crore.

However, TCS added Rs 60,168.79 crore taking its mcap to Rs 15,43,313.32 crore.

The valuation of Infosys surged Rs 11,792.44 crore to Rs 8,16,626.78 crore and that of Bharti Airtel climbed Rs 8,999.41 crore to Rs 9,19,933.99 crore. The mcap of Hindustan Unilever rallied Rs 8,564.26 crore to Rs 5,73,758.44 crore. —*PTI*

Inflation, Q3 earnings, FIIs to drive markets this week

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

Investors will take cues from the December quarter corporate earnings, with blue-chips like Infosys, Reliance Industries scheduled to report their results this week, in addition, inflation data and trading activity of foreign investors will also be crucial in dictating market trends, analysts said.

Movement of crude oil prices and the dollar index will also be tracked by investors. The strengthening of the US dollar, along with rising US bond yields, impacted investors' confidence last week.

"The Indian equity markets are poised for a volatile week ahead, as investors eagerly await the release of Q3 earning reports from major companies.

"Prominent names such as Infosys, Reliance Industries, HCL Technologies, HDFC AMC, HDFC Life Insurance Company, and Axis Bank are set to unveil their financial performance, which is likely to significantly impact market sentiment," Pravesh Gour, Senior Technical Analyst, Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.

Movement of crude oil prices and the dollar index will also be tracked by investors ***PHOTO: PTI***

- The strengthening of the US dollar, along with rising US bond yields, impacted investors' confidence last week

Adding to the market's dynamic, a tug-of-war between Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) and Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) continues to unfold, he said.

"India's CPI release on Monday will be a key factor," Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

WPI inflation data is scheduled to be announced on Tuesday.

Records show that last week, the BSE benchmark slumped 1,844.2 points or 2.32 per cent, and the Nifty dropped 573.25 points or 2.38 per cent. —*PTI*

Adani announces ₹65K cr projects in Chhattisgarh

RAIPUR, 12 JAN

Industrialist Gautam Adani on Sunday called on Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai and announced an investment of Rs 65,000 crore in the Adani Group's energy and cement projects in the state, officials said.

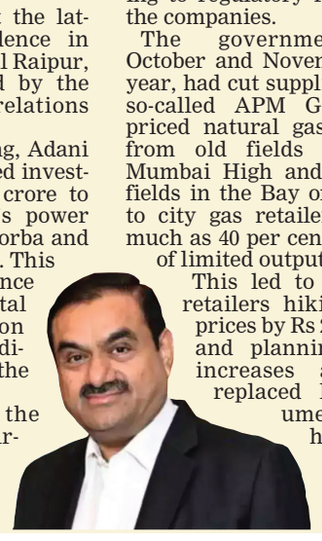
Adani met Sai at the latter's official residence in Chhattisgarh capital Raipur, a statement issued by the state's public relations department said.

During the meeting, Adani announced a planned investment of Rs 60,000 crore to expand the group's power plants in Raipur, Korba and Raigarh in the state. This expansion will enhance Chhattisgarh's total power generation capacity by an additional 6,120 MW, the statement said.

Additionally, the Adani Group chairman also committed Rs 5,000 crore for the development and expansion of the group's cement plants in the state, it said.

Meanwhile, the government has increased cheaper gas supply to city gas retailers IGL, Adani-Total, and Mahanagar Gas, restoring a major part of the allocation that was cut in 2024, according to regulatory filings by the companies.

The government, in October and November last year, had cut supplies of the so-called APM Gas (low-priced natural gas coming from old fields such as Mumbai High and Bassein fields in the Bay of Bengal) to city gas retailers by as much as 40 per cent in view of limited output.



This led to city gas retailers hiking CNG prices by Rs 2-3 per kg and planning more increases as they replaced lost volumes with higher-priced fuel. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Indiabulls-Embassy Group merger gets NCLAT approval

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

In a major relief to Indiabulls Real Estate (IBREL) and Embassy Group, the appellate tribunal NCLAT has sanctioned the scheme of amalgamation to merge both the real estate firms after setting aside the NCLT order stalling the process.

"We set aside the impugned order of NCLT, Chandigarh and allow the prayer to sanction the scheme of amalgamation between the appellants," said a two-member NCLAT bench.

The merger was on hold for the last 18 months, as the Chandigarh bench of the NCLT had withheld its permission in May 2023, despite all regulatory clearances from the CCI, bourses, RoC and approval from respective shareholders and creditors.

The appellate tribunal said the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) should not have interfered in the valuation done by the experts using one of the standard prescribed valuation methods.

"After going through the facts and circumstances and the relevant judicial precedences, we hold that NCLT, Chandigarh has erred in interfering in the Scheme ignoring the commercial wisdom of shareholders, creditors and Board of Directors of the appellant companies," said NCLAT.

Meanwhile, the NCLAT dismissed a plea to stay the insolvency proceedings against debt-ridden Indrajit Power.

The appellate tribunal said "no error has been committed" by the NCLT, while admitting the plea to initiate insolvency proceedings against the Maharashtra-based company on February 1, 2024, filed by Yes Bank.

The said order passed by the Mumbai bench of NCLT was challenged by Rajiv Munjal, a director from the suspended board of Indrajit Power, before the NCLAT. —*PTI*

My wife loves staring at me: Adar mocks L&T chief's remark

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla has joined the ongoing conversation about work-life balance, emphasizing the importance of quality over quantity in work hours. In a lighthearted social media post, Poonawalla echoed Mahindra Group Chairman Anand Mahindra's sentiment, saying, "Yes [Anand Mahindra], even my wife [Natasha Poonawalla] thinks I am wonderful; she loves staring at me on Sundays. Quality of work over quantity always."

Poonawalla's comment followed a controversial remark by Larsen & Toubro (L&T) Chairman SN Subrahmanyan, who advocated for 90-hour workweeks, including Sundays, to stay competitive. Subrahmanyan questioned the value of leisure time, saying, "How long can you stare at your wife? How long can wives stare at their husbands? Get to the office and start working."

The debate over work-life balance has also reignited past comments by Infosys founder Narayana Murthy, who suggested employees should be prepared for 70-hour workweeks.

Amid this, Mahindra and Poonawalla's remarks have offered a contrasting perspective, emphasizing smart work and the value of personal time. —*Agencies*

TCS expects margin benefits as BSNL deal tapers

MUMBAI, 12 JAN

Tapering off in the BSNL deal expected over the next few quarters will aid TCS to expand profit margin, a senior company official has said.

The country's largest software exporter is also looking at creating a capacity of over 25,000 seats in Bengaluru over the long term on a land parcel acquired recently, Chief Financial Officer Samir Seksaria told PTI here.

"The same program (BSNL) as it tapers down at a portfolio level, at an overall level, there would be a benefit which would come in (on margins)," Seksaria said replying a specific question on the impact of BSNL deal's tapering down on margins.

Seksaria added that there would be a tapering down in the BSNL contract till the September quarter of FY26.

The company was able to post a sequential margin expansion of 0.4 per cent and maintain it on a year-on-year basis despite the 1.70 per cent wage hikes earlier in the fiscal year.

The ongoing rupee depreciation against the dollar helps profitability, but the appreciation of the local currency against other world currencies has resulted in no margin gains, Seksaria said.

On the Rs 1,625-crore land buy deal from a Tata group company announced last week, Seksaria said the company is planning to put the capacity to expand in Whitefield, a prime area of the IT capital.

The company already has about 70,000 employees in various offices across Bengaluru —*PTI*

The country's largest software exporter is also looking at creating a capacity of over 25,000 seats in Bengaluru ***PHOTO: PTI***

FUTURE UNLEASHED: CES 2025 INNOVATIONS

CES 2025, the world's largest technology fair hosted by the Consumer Technology Association (CTA), in Las Vegas, brought together ground breaking innovations that promise to redefine the future. From flying cars to AI-powered health-check selfies, the event showcased advancements across artificial intelligence, digital health, mobility, energy sustainability, and more

EMPOWERING LIVES

'LETMEDOIT' APP

- Developed by Indian-origin entrepreneur Angad Sahgal
- First disability-focused decision-making app

ELECTRIC SALT SPOON

- Created by Kirin Holdings, Japan
- Uses mild electric current to enhance flavour in low-sodium meals

AI-POWERED SMART MIRROR (FACEHEART ARDIOMIRROR)

- Provides cardiac health assessments through a 45-second 'selfie'
- Detects heart conditions, stress index, and vital signs such as heart rate, blood pressure, respiratory rate, oxygen saturation etc.

MOBILITY REVOLUTION

XPENG AEROHT's FLYING CAR

- Aircraft that fits into a car trunk
- Combines driving and flying seamlessly

WAYMO'S AUTONOMOUS VEHICLES

- Expanding ride-hailing services to more cities

EVENT SCALE

- 4,500+ exhibitors, including 1,400 startups
- 1,41,000+ attendees from 150+ countries

IN 20 YEARS

Apple fleecing users with Steve's model: Zuck

CALIFORNIA, 12 JAN

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg criticised Apple on Friday, accusing the tech giant of stagnating in innovation and enforcing arbitrary rules on developers. Speaking on the Joe Rogan Experience, Zuckerberg acknowledged the transformative impact of the iPhone but argued that Apple has failed to produce groundbreaking products in recent years.

"Steve Jobs invented the iPhone, and now they're just sitting on it 20 years later," Zuckerberg said, praising the initial innovation but condemning the company's current approach.

He accused Apple of "squeezing" customers through steep developer commissions and pushing sales of accessories like AirPods, which he said restrict compatibility with third-party devices. "They've hamstrung anyone else from building products that connect to the iPhone the same way," he remarked.

Zuckerberg suggested that Meta's profits could double if Apple dropped its restrictive policies, which he criticised as being disguised under privacy and security concerns. "It's insecure because you didn't build any security into it," he argued, urging Apple to improve encryption and security protocols instead of limiting third-party access.

He also commented on Apple's mixed-reality headset, Vision Pro, labeling it as a rare attempt at innovation but noting its underwhelming market performance. "The V1 definitely did not hit it out of the park," Zuckerberg said.

The Meta CEO's remarks highlight ongoing tensions between the two tech giants, particularly over app store policies, privacy, and the future of consumer technology. —*Agencies*

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg and ex-Apple CEO Steve Jobs ***PHOTO: X***

Gavaskar honoured at Wankhede's 50th anniversary

MUMBAI, 12 JAN

Legendary cricketers, including Sunil Gavaskar and Vinod Kambli, were honoured by the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) as part of the inaugural festivities celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Wankhede Stadium. Gavaskar, the first captain from Mumbai, received a memento from MCA President Ajinkya Naik, expressing his gratitude for the opportunities the MCA has provided throughout his career. Kambli, who recently recovered from health complications, reminisced about his memorable performances at the iconic venue, including his first double century against England. He encouraged aspiring cricketers to remain dedicated to their craft. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

14-year-old Ira sets record for highest U19 score by Indian

BAREILLY, 12 JAN

Fourteen-year-old Mumbai opener Ira Jadhav became the first Indian to score a triple hundred in Under-19 cricket, when she made a 346 against Meghalaya in the U19 Women's One Day Trophy here on Sunday. Ira, a student of the Sharadashram Vidyamandir, the alma mater of Sachin Tendulkar, Vinod Kambli and Ajit Agarkar made her runs in 157 balls with 42 fours and 16 sixes. This is also the highest score in Youth List A matches by an Indian but the world record in the segment stands in the name of Lizelle Lee of South Africa, who made 427 in 2010 in a domestic match. Jadhav, who went unsold in the previous Women's Premier League auction, however has been named among the standbys for India's U19 T20 World Cup squad for the tournament to be held in Malaysia. *—PTI*

AB de Villiers defends Proteas ahead of WTC final

JOHANNESBURG, 12 JAN

AB de Villiers has defended the South African cricket team's recent performances, asserting that the criticism they have faced is unjust. As they prepare to face Australia in their first World Test Championship (WTC) final at Lord's in June, De Villiers highlighted the numerous changes the team has undergone in recent years, including retirements and coaching changes. He praised the young players stepping up and acknowledged the team's achievement in reaching the WTC final despite challenges. De Villiers expressed confidence in the current squad's potential, emphasising the importance of supporting young talent. "Proteas have done exceptionally well... they're a bunch of fighters," he stated. He also showed enthusiasm for the SA20 tournament, noting the excitement among players and coaches as a positive sign for South African cricket's future. *—PTI*

Hady now 1st Lebanese to win Grand Slam singles

MELBOURNE, 12 JAN

Hady Habib's history-making run at the Australian Open will continue after the first man to represent Lebanon in a Grand Slam singles tournament in the Open era became the first to win a match, defeating Bu Yunchaokete of China 7-6 (4), 6-4, 7-6 (6) on Sunday. The 26-year-old Habib won three matches in qualifying rounds just to get into the field of 128 players. Now he'll be one of the 64 to make it into the second round after his victory on Day 1 at Melbourne Park, which was achieved with the help of 61 winners, 36 more than his opponent. Habib, who is ranked outside the top 200, was born in Houston, Texas; his father is Lebanese. *—PTI*

Indian squad for CT to be announced next week

Before Champions Trophy, India will face England in 3 ODIs; series opener will begin on 6 Feb

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

The much-awaited announcement of India's 15-member squad for the Champions Trophy 2025 is expected to be announced on 18 or 19 January, informed BCCI vice-president Rajeev Shukla.

The T20I series squad for series against England was announced on Saturday.

Champions Trophy will begin on 19 February and India will play all their games in Dubai. 4

Before CT, India will face England in three ODIs and the series opener will begin on 6 February in Nagpur.

Fresh blow for Shakib, fails bowling action test

Shakib Al Hasan suffered a fresh setback ahead of of the Champions Trophy after failing a second test of his bowling action, keeping him suspended from rolling his arm over in both domestic and international cricket.

T20I squad for series against England was announced on Sat PHOTO: X

The all-rounder was reassessed at the Sri Ramachandra Centre for Sports Science in Chennai last month, but the results did not lead to any change in his status.

Kiwis name young pacers O'Rourke, Smith and Sears

Fast bowlers Lockie Ferguson and Ben Sears were recalled to New Zealand's 15-man squad on Sunday for the Champions Trophy next month in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates.

- Champions Trophy will begin on 19 February and India will play all their games in Dubai

Ferguson is no longer contracted to New Zealand Cricket and missed the home series against Sri Lanka which finished on Sunday, while playing in Australia's Big Bash League.

Sears, Will O'Rourke and Nathan Smith have been named to play at their first ICC tournament but Jacob Duffy, who was outstanding in the T20 and one-day international series against Sri Lanka, has been named as a traveling reserve. —PTI/Agencies

Bumrah's fitness raises Test captaincy doubts

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

Jasprit Bumrah is the front-runner to replace Rohit Sharma as India's Test captain going forward but the peerless pacer doesn't seem to be a long-term option given his nagging fitness concerns, the latest being a back spasm which has rendered him doubtful for next month's Champions Trophy.

Indian selectors are hopeful that he still might have some role in the Champions Trophy since it's a swelling, but when one looks at the bigger picture the question arises whether he can be deemed a permanent skipper in Tests, now that Rohit's days in whites look.

If Bumrah is fit and ready to lead the Test side in England, chief selector Ajit Agarkar and his four colleagues need to have a strong name as vice-captain so that in case of an unforeseen scenario, the deputy is good to take charge.

For now, in Tests, only two names are in the reckoning -- Rishabh Pant and Yashasvi Jaiswal.

Post the review meeting, one can conclude that it is very unlikely Rohit will travel to England for the five Tests, and the 31-year-old Bumrah will certainly lead the team in the first Test at Headingly if all goes well. *—PTI*

Saikia, Bhatia elected as BCCI Secretary & Treasurer

MUMBAI, 12 JAN

Devajit Saikia and Prabhtej Singh Bhatia were on Sunday elected secretary and treasurer, respectively, unopposed at the BCCI Special General Meeting here.

They both were elected unopposed after being the only ones to file nomination for the posts vacated by Jay Shah and Ashish Shelar.

Shah had to leave the secretary's post after becoming the ICC chairman last month while Shelar resigned after taking oath as a cabinet minister in the Maharashtra government.

Saikia hails from Assam and Bhatia from Chhattisgarh.

Saikia was performing the additional duties of secretary after Shah took over as ICC chairman on December 1. He was the joint secretary and now that post lies vacant.

"The Two (02) Elective Posts of the Office Bearers - Secretary and Treasurer were Uncontested, and it was not necessary to conduct a Poll in respect of these Two (02) Posts," stated electoral officer A K Joti in his declaration of results.

Shah, who was felicitated by the BCCI on Saturday night, was also feted at the SGM.

Speaking to reporters after the SGM,

- Shah had to leave the secretary's post after becoming the ICC chairman last month while Shelar resigned after taking oath as a cabinet minister

BCCI vice-president Rajeev Shukla said apart from the election nothing was tabled in the meeting.

"There was single point agenda (for the election of treasurer and secretary post). So nothing else was discussed at the SGM," Shukla.

Following the SGM, Shukla was also part of Women's Premier League Committee meeting. *—PTI*

IPL 2025 to begin on 23 March: Rajeev

NEW DELHI, 12 JAN

PHOTO: WIKI

Indian Premier League (IPL) 2025 is set to begin on 23 March, as confirmed by BCCI vice-president Rajeev Shukla during a media interaction on Sunday after the Board's general meeting.

Key administrative changes were also announced at the meeting. Devajit Saikia will replace Jay Shah as BCCI secretary, while Prabhtej Singh Bhatia takes over as treasurer. Additionally, Shukla mentioned that Champions Trophy squad discussions will occur between 19-19 January, and venues for the 2025 Women's Premier League (WPL) will be announced soon.

However, conflicting reports suggest the IPL might start earlier. ESPNCricinfo reported a possible 21 March start, while a BCCI source told PTI it could be 20 or 21 March.

The meeting also addressed India's poor performances in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy and a subsequent home series against New Zealand. Indian captain Rohit Sharma and Gautam Gambhir participated in a review, with a focus on identifying shortcomings and necessary corrections. A BCCI insider indicated that while discussions were detailed, no immediate decisions should be expected.

The IPL 2025 mega auction was held in November last year in Jeddah to significant attention, with a total of 182 players sold for a staggering Rs 639.15 crore.

The auction was dominated by marquee players, with Rishabh Pant becoming the most expensive player in IPL history after being sold for Rs 27 crore.

Other notable names such as Shreyas Iyer (Rs 26.75 crore) and Venkatesh Iyer (Rs 23.75 crore) also attracted substantial bids, while players like David Warner, Prithvi Shaw, and Shardul Thakur went unsold. *—Agencies*

Left out of WI series, Afridi's Test future is uncertain

KARACHI, 12 JAN

Pakistan's leading fast bowler, Shaheen Shah Afridi, faces an uncertain future in red-ball cricket after being omitted from the two-Test series against the West Indies at home. Since early 2024, Afridi has either been dropped or rested for eight out of Pakistan's last twelve Tests, raising questions about his role in the Test squad.

The left-arm pacer, who boasts an impressive record of 116 wickets in 32 Tests, was also overlooked for the two-Test series in South Africa. Selectors explained that the aim was to keep him fresh for the ICC Champions Trophy, commencing 19 February.

Afridi's omission follows a pattern, having also missed the last two Tests against England and earlier matches against Bangladesh. The selectors recently announced a 15-member squad for the West Indies series without Afridi and regular pacers like Naseem Shah and Mir Hamza. A source close to the selectors indicated that both Afridi and Naseem are being carefully managed ahead of the Champions Trophy. *—PTI*

2ND WOMEN'S ODI

Jemimah's maiden ton seals series against Ireland

RAJKOT, 12 JAN

PHOTO: X/@BBCI

A collective batting performance headlined by Jemimah Rodrigues' maiden hundred formed the cornerstone of India's commanding 116-run win against Ireland in the second women's ODI here on Sunday as the hosts took an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

India scored a massive 370 for five riding on three half-centuries and a ton before restricting Ireland to 254 for 7 in the stipulated 50 overs.

It was the elegant skipper Smriti Mandhana, who was first off the blocks with an attacking 73 off just 54 balls, while Rodrigues' first hundred (102 off 91 balls) ensured a smooth finish for the hosts.

Newcomer Pratika Rawal (67 off 61 balls) and seasoned Harleen Deol (89 off 84 balls) also made merry on a sub-par bowling attack.

Ireland batted steadily but never had the firepower to surpass a gigantic Indian total. Save Christina Coulter Reilly's 80, there wasn't much fight from the other batters as off-spinner Deepti Sharma emerged as the pick of the Indian bowlers with figures of 3 for 37.

Seamer Titas Sadhu got 1 for 48 in 10 overs.

Earlier, India's total was based on two big stands -- 156 off 19 overs between Mandhana and Rawal and 183 off 28 overs between Rodrigues and Deol.

In all, Indian batters smashed an astounding 44 boundaries and three sixes in 50 overs. *—PTI*

Ireland's Maguire reported for suspect bowling action

RAJKOT, 12 JAN

Ireland's left-arm off-spinner Aimee Maguire has been reported for a suspect bowling action following the opening women's ODI against India in Rajkot. The 18-year-old had claimed 3 for 57 from eight overs during Friday's ODI which Ireland lost by six wickets. The match officials' report, handed over to the Ireland team management, expressed concerns regarding the legality of Maguire's bowling action. The incident prompted the ICC to formally notify Cricket Ireland, confirming that a 'Suspect Illegal Bowling Action' report was lodged after the ODI against India. As per the ICC's investigation process, the spinner is permitted to continue bowling in international cricket until the testing results are available. *—PTI*

Man City beat Salford City 8-0 in FA Cup

MANCHESTER, 12 JAN

In a stunning display of strength, Manchester City overwhelmed fourth-tier Salford City 8-0 in the FA Cup, as Premier League clubs flexed their muscles across the competition. Liverpool and Chelsea also secured convincing victories, while Brighton, Bournemouth, and Leicester cruised into the next round, with the six clubs netting an impressive total of 32 goals.

Despite resting key players, Pep Guardiola's City made a statement at the Etihad, with rising star James McAtee netting a second-half hat trick. Jack Grealish, who hadn't scored in 38 matches, also contributed to the rout. Salford, co-owned by United legends including David Beckham and Ryan Giggs, suffered a painful defeat after winning their previous six matches without conceding.

The biggest upset of the day came when Plymouth, rooted to the bottom of League One, shocked Brentford with a late winner, ending an 11-game winless streak. In other action, Liverpool continued its pursuit of an unprecedented quadruple.

Notable performances included James Justin and Georginio Rutter, who excelled for their respective teams, as the FA Cup served up its usual mix of thrills and surprises. *—PTI*

AND THEN THERE WAS ONE

Djokovic stands alone as era of big three ends

MELBOURNE, 12 JAN

The era of men's tennis' "Big Three" has dwindled to just Novak Djokovic, following Rafael Nadal's retirement, joining Roger Federer, who stepped away in 2022. The Australian Open, which commenced this week, marks the first Grand Slam tournament of 2025 since Nadal's last match at the Davis Cup in November.

Francisco Cerúndolo, a 26-year-old Argentine player, reflected on the significance of this transition, stating, "It's tough for us. We grew up watching all of them." Djokovic, aiming for his 11th title at Melbourne Park and a record 25th Grand Slam overall, is set to face 19-year-old Californian Nishesh Basavareddy.

"It's a nice number of years that I've been coming to Australia," Djokovic noted. This event will see him coached by former rival Andy Murray, who retired in August. "Novak is not just one of the best tennis players of all time; he's one of the best athletes ever," Murray stated.

Novak Djokovic at the Australia Open PHOTO: PTI

Basavareddy, who grew up idolising Djokovic, acknowledged the Serb's influence on his career. Djokovic, despite a challenging 2024 season marred by injuries, recently secured his first Olympic singles gold medal.

- Current players still regard Djokovic as a formidable contender, with Alexander Zverev and Carlos Alcaraz both acknowledging his ongoing threat

Current players still regard Djokovic as a formidable contender, with Alexander Zverev and Carlos Alcaraz both acknowledging his ongoing threat. Alcaraz emphasised, "If he goes to Australia hungry, he is going to be one of the favourites to win." As Djokovic continues his journey, the legacy of the Big Three endures amidst a changing landscape in tennis. *—PTI*

Sumit Nagal at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia PHOTO: PTI

Australia Open: Nagal knocked in opening round

MELBOURNE, 12 JAN

A profligate Sumit Nagal's Australian Open campaign ended in a straight-set defeat against world number 25 Tomas Machac in the men's singes event here on Sunday.

The top Indian singles player failed to capitalise on his chances, losing 3-6 1-6 5-7 to his opponent form Czech Republic, who dominated with his superior consistency and precision.

Nagal, ranked 91st, started the match confidently, dropping just two points in his first three service games.

However, a double fault and a string of forced and unforced errors saw him lose his serve in the seventh and ninth games, handing Machac. In the second set, Nagal had an early chance to break Machac in the opening game, but the Czech player held firm.

Other Indian players in the doubles draw include Yuki Bhambri, N Sriram Balaji and Rithvik Bollipalli, who will compete with their respective partners. *—PTI*